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*Exercising reproductive rights ‘atypically’ and ‘independently.’ A critical interpretation of “American popular culture” in “As We See It.”*

ABSTRACT

The article investigates how the reproductive rights of women with autism are represented in the American TV series “As We See It,” situating the discussion within broader debates on U.S. disability law, normality, and reproductive justice. It adopts a critical theoretical framework that combines Michel Foucault’s reflections with contributions from activists with disability, alongside insights from Disability, Feminist, and Autism Studies. The paper argues that the marginal representation of the perspectives of women with autism in “American popular culture,” exemplified by the series, reflects forms of reproductive discrimination also identified in legal and healthcare contexts. To address this point, it draws on Julia Kristeva’s notion of the “Semiotic,” framing the testimonies of women with autism as affirmative, “atypical” modes of communication that destabilize dominant “Symbolic” structures. It concludes that an emerging “autistic culture” can significantly enrich law and its critical, social, and cultural dimensions.

KEYWORDS

Reproductive rights, Disability law, Autistic culture, Feminist Disability Studies, Cultural Studies.

INDEX

1. Difficult times for reproductive rights in the U.S. 2. Reproductive rights of women with disabilities: between eugenic legal logics and biases. 3. The weight of ‘normality’ in “As We See It”. 4. Sexuality and Reproductive Rights of women with autism: the character of Violet. 5. Between rhetoric of tenderness and fear of “abnormal” reproduction. 6. Accessing reproductive rights to live “independently”: the ‘critical’ component of “As We See It.” 7. A lack of intersectionality. 8. From Violet to Kristeva.

1. Difficult times for reproductive rights in the U.S.

This article offers a critical commentary on the American TV series “As We See It”, in order to analyze how certain scenes exemplify the way the ‘theme’ of sexuality in women with autism is represented within the cultural, social, and political context of the United States. The exercise of reproductive rights is becoming increasingly difficult for American women due to restrictive policies.

The situation is even more complicated for women with disabilities, as I explain below.

It is particularly telling that Wisp, an online emergency contraceptive retailer, and Winx Health, a startup specializing in contraceptives and sexual health products, reported an increase in sales of the morning-after pills “Plan B” and “Restart” of approximately 1,000 per cent and 315 per cent respectively the day after the U.S. elections in November 2024.<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon alarmingly recalls what occurred in June 2022, when American women panic-bought emergency contraceptives in

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\*All translations from Italian are the author’s unless otherwise noted.

<sup>1</sup> See Capilupi 2024.

## EXERCISING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS 'ATYPICALLY' AND 'INDEPENDENTLY.'

### A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF "AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE" IN "AS WE SEE IT."

response to the collective fear triggered by the Supreme Court's overturning of the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision, and the subsequent devolution of abortion legislation to individual states.<sup>2</sup>

As activists and scholars Loretta J. Ross and Rickie Solinger point out, *Articles 16 and 25* of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)* express a normative commitment to family life, health, and social protection<sup>3</sup>. Yet, as the U.S. Supreme Court recalled in *Sosa v. Alvarez-Machain*, the *UDHR* is "a statement of principles" rather than "a treaty or international agreement" imposing legal obligations<sup>4</sup>. Accordingly, these provisions cannot, on their own, secure reproductive rights at the federal level in the United States. Therefore, the already existing disparities in treatment between women living in different areas of the country would be further exacerbated by the political trend<sup>5</sup>.

Moreover, with specific reference to women with disabilities, since the United States has not ratified the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*, the protections provided by Articles 25 and 6 – the latter of which explicitly addresses the notion of "multiple discrimination" faced by adolescent girls and women with disabilities – are not enforceable in domestic law. For these individuals, geographic discrimination in the exercise of reproductive rights intersects with other forms of discrimination, resulting in complex and multidimensional experiences of marginalization, in line with the concept of "intersectionality" coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. The term is used by the author to refer to different "framework[s] for discrimination" that include gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, age, and disability.<sup>6</sup>

This paper aims to reflect on how reproductive rights can be effectively exercised by women with autism, according to the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* and to the *CRPD*. It seeks to link this issue to a specific representation of such rights that emerges from the analysis of the TV series.

On the one hand, the recent governmental measures concerning reproductive rights fall within a broader political agenda of cutting "Medicaid", the main public insurance program for low-income individuals and people with disabilities.<sup>7</sup> Beyond that, individuals with autism face even greater economic and socio-political hardship due to potential difficulties, associated with neurodiversity, in understanding the law and the range of choices available to them.

To fully grasp the situation, a thorough reading of the testimonies of American women with autism would be necessary, an undertaking not possible within the constraints of this article. However, I drew inspiration from comments on social media and social networks posted by some women who experience such restrictions. In particular, I will offer a critical analysis of "As We See It" through

<sup>2</sup> Although the Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to abortion recognized in *Roe* and reaffirmed in *Casey*, the Court did not expressly abandon all reproductive-rights precedents. Two cases are essential in this respect. In 1965, *Griswold v. Connecticut* held that the use of contraception by married couples was protected by the constitutional right of privacy. Seven years later, in *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, the Court extended this protection to unmarried persons.

<sup>3</sup> Ross and Solinger 2017: 85–89 and 178–185.

<sup>4</sup> See *Sosa v. Alvarez-Machain*, 542 U.S. 692, 734–35 (2004). See also *Flores v. Southern Peru Copper Corp.*, 414 F.3d 233, 254–56 (2d Cir. 2003).

<sup>5</sup> In January 2025, President Trump signed *Executive Order 14182*, "Enforcing the Hyde Amendment," which revoked *Executive Orders 14076* and *14079*, two Biden-era orders aimed at protecting and expanding access to reproductive healthcare services, including abortion care, medication abortion, and emergency contraception. The trajectory of Trump's second term has also raised concerns about a partial alignment between the administration's agenda and *Project 2025*, a Heritage Foundation-led presidential transition project launched in 2022 and later published as *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*. The project seeks to substantially restructure the U.S. federal government by strengthening presidential control over the executive branch and advancing a conservative policy agenda. If this alignment were to extend further into reproductive policy, one concern would be the revival of the *Comstock Act*, a nineteenth-century federal statute often described as a "zombie law." Enacted in 1873, the Act restricts the mailing and interstate carriage of obscene materials and abortion-related drugs or supplies; a strict interpretation could be used to limit access to medication abortion and abortion-related materials. *Project 2025* also separately proposes eliminating Ella, ulipristal acetate, an emergency contraceptive, from the contraceptive mandate by characterizing it as a "potential abortifacient." See Correa-Buntley 2024; Popli 2025; Molly Jong-Fast 2024. For partial counter-trends at state level, see Catucci 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Crenshaw 1989: 150.

<sup>7</sup> I refer to Glenza 2025.

the lens of key scholars in *Disability Studies* drawing, in the conclusion, from the philosophical, semiotic, and psychoanalytic teachings of Julia Kristeva. I intend, anyway, to dedicate future work to the analysis of the autobiographies of women with autism.

On the other hand, the effective exercise of such rights is not independent from the way they are represented through the various cultural tools we routinely consume. This is the focus of the article: “As We See It” offers an important example of how the dynamics that biopolitically impact the bodies of American citizens are culturally represented, rejected, silenced, reproduced, challenged, and manipulated. These actions intersect to form the cultural product we ultimately engage with.

There is, indeed, a visible line of connection between the law – as briefly outlined above and further discussed in the next section – and what is referred to as “American popular culture”: it “point[s] to some of the crucial relations through which a whole field of cultural relations is supported and reproduced”, and in doing so, it also shows how “the field of cultural relations itself has effects for political and economic and other practices”, which evidently includes the law.<sup>8</sup> In particular, one of the primary effects of “American popular culture” is on the individual who, when represented, may feel like a legitimate member of the social and political community. This thesis is confirmed by the activist Alice Wong, who writes: “discovering a community of disabled people and learning our stories gave me a sense of what is possible” and “made me wonder (...) how my worldview would have changed if I had seen someone like me as a glamorous, confident adult”.<sup>9</sup>

A second effect concerns the community at large, which is prompted to reflect on the criteria that determine inclusion or exclusion. As Flavia Monceri points out, the representations provided by various cultural products give ‘visibility’ to ‘non-normative’ bodies as “a difference that makes a difference.”<sup>10</sup> This effect also applies when the representation does not concern physical difference but rather cognitive difference, as is the case with autism. Although cultural portrayals of autism remain largely stereotypical these portrayals nonetheless help draw attention to an “atypical” mode of both cultural and legal positioning.<sup>11</sup>

The article focuses on how this positioning is conveyed in “As We See It”, an Amazon Prime Video series adapted from the Israeli original “On the Spectrum”. The series performs both functions commonly associated with “American popular culture”: it operates as an accessible cultural product while also drawing attention to significant issues that affect multiple dimensions of personhood.

Although the series devotes only one scene to contraception, it nevertheless offers a useful entry point for approaching the broader question of the reproductive rights of women with autism. This is especially relevant in light of the quite limited number of fictional television narratives that address, even indirectly, the sexual and reproductive self-determination of women with autism<sup>12</sup>. In this context, even a brief scene concerning emergency contraception becomes valuable, not because it exhausts the issue, but because it opens a space for reflection on a theme that remains largely underrepresented.

<sup>8</sup> Hall 2018: 932-938.

<sup>9</sup> Wong 2020: xvi.

<sup>10</sup> Monceri 2012: 22.

<sup>11</sup> Di Biagio 2019: 42. The term “atypical” is used here not in a pathologizing sense, but as a critical term opposed to the implicit norm of the “typical” or “neurotypical” mind. In this sense, it resonates with Luisa Di Biagio’s work on autistic sexuality, which approaches sexuality not as an area of absence or deficiency, but as a dimension experienced through autistic modes of perception, embodiment, communication, and relationality. Within *Critical Autism Studies* the term is understood as a way of naming forms of neurocognitive, affective, sensory, and relational experience that do not conform to neuronormative expectations. On this point see Nick Walker 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Examples remain relatively scarce. Beyond *As We See It*, fictional television has only occasionally represented the sexuality, intimacy, or reproductive agency of women with autism. Examples include *Everything’s Gonna Be Okay* (Freeform/Hulu, 2020–2021), through Matilda and Drea’s sexual and romantic relationship; *Heartbreak High* (Netflix, 2022), through Quinni’s queer romantic and sexual agency; *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* (ENA/Netflix, 2022), through Woo Young-woo’s romantic relationship and negotiation of intimacy; and *Bron/Broen / The Bridge* (SVT/DR, 2011–2018). These examples, however, confirm the broader scarcity of fictional narratives directly engaging with the reproductive rights of women with autism.

## EXERCISING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS 'ATYPICALLY' AND 'INDEPENDENTLY.'

### A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF "AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE" IN "AS WE SEE IT."

To this end, the next section highlights some troubling aspects of the American legal framework related to the reproductive rights of women with disabilities, rooted in a unique historical background.

The third section explains how the series simultaneously challenges and reinforces a given conception of 'normality', with significant "biopolitical" consequences on the lives, on society, and on the law, as previously outlined.<sup>13</sup> The fourth section shows how this impact also extends to the realm of sexuality by analyzing the character of Violet, a young adult with autism portrayed by actress with autism Sue Ann Pien. The fifth section points to some of the 'dangers' the series glosses over regarding the sexual education of women with disabilities. The sixth section situates these reflections within the international legal framework surrounding the right to "independently living" as enshrined in Article 19 (CRPD) and, although not with the same terminology, within American law, linking housing choices, self-determination, and emotional relationships. The seventh paragraph then emphasizes the series' failure to adopt the autistic female perspective on these matters, arguing for the inclusion of critical perspectives from *Feminist Disability Studies* and *Autism Studies*.

Finally, the eighth section connects the article's content with the thought of philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, examining how her notions of the "Chora" and the "Semiotic" might offer a critical lens through which to rethink reproductive rights from a neurodiverse and feminist standpoint.<sup>14</sup> The cultural product under analysis is thus placed within a broader "intertextual" framework that, it is hoped, will be capable of encompassing the bodily and sexual demands of activists with autism and the many branches of *Critical Studies* devoted to the topic.

## 2. Reproductive rights of women with disabilities: between eugenic legal logics and biases.

In the introduction, I addressed the challenges American women face in exercising reproductive rights amid socio-political changes. Women with disabilities emerge from a peculiar historical background now worryingly resurfacing in recent U.S. laws. The article examines their legal positioning – especially women with autism – as "new" political subjects, historically absent from debates that concern them.<sup>15</sup>

Their novelty in *Disability* and *Feminist Studies* and "popular cultural" representation, as Wong notes, is mirrored in activists' struggles to access gynecological care, often encountering providers reluctant to share contraceptive information.<sup>16</sup> American Paralympic athlete Kristin Duquette recalls a Pap test as emotionally painful due to staff attitudes, architectural barriers, and scarce elevators or adjustable tables.<sup>17</sup> These obstacles limit screenings, producing discrimination and health risks from lack of prevention.

The issue goes beyond prevention or contraception. A 2022 *National Women's Law Center* Report states that "31 states, plus Washington D.C., have laws that permit forced sterilization" of people with disabilities. Elsewhere, uncertainty persists, since "we don't know for sure what a judge would do if someone petitioned for forced sterilization."<sup>18</sup> Specifically, laws enacted in 2019 in Iowa and Nevada allow the "guardian of the person" – the individual appointed by the court to represent and make decisions on behalf of the protected person – to authorize "the sterilization of the protected person," with judicial approval.<sup>19</sup> Such provisions, overriding consent in the name of "best interest,"

<sup>13</sup> Foucault 1986 [1978]: 140 explains that – unlike "disciplinary power" – "biopolitics" operates 'from above' to govern collective vital and biological processes. For further insights see Esposito 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Kristeva 1984: 25.

<sup>15</sup> On this point, see Carnovali 2018: 117.

<sup>16</sup> Becker 1997: S26–S33. Biggs et al 2023: 1–14. Horner-Johnson et al. 2021: 732.

<sup>17</sup> Duquette 2019.

<sup>18</sup> National Women's Law Center's report.

<sup>19</sup> Nevada Law, section 159.0806. Iowa Law, section 633.635.

recall a troubling eugenic past: not only Nazi crimes against people with disability (notorious is “Aktion T4” program) but also Kansas in the 1920s, where fairs tested “fittest families.”<sup>20</sup>

Turning to women with autism, even without such invasive practices, discrimination persists. A 2024 study on 700 adolescents found they are “significantly more likely to have diagnoses of menstrual disorders, polycystic ovary syndrome, and premenstrual syndrome than typically developing adolescents.”<sup>21</sup> They also “are less likely (...) to visit the obstetrician-gynecologist and to use hormonal contraception, suggesting possible care disparities that may persist into adulthood.”<sup>22</sup>

This reflects a broader issue: delayed autism diagnosis in females. One study showed girls with Asperger’s were diagnosed “1.8 years” later than boys; in adulthood, women received diagnosis “4.3 years” later.<sup>23</sup> Researchers stress the need for diagnostic tools tailored to female symptoms<sup>24</sup>, since current criteria are “gender-biased.”<sup>25</sup> Lower presence of women with autism in gynecological care and reduced access to contraception derive from a broader issue: delayed diagnosis means delayed care and, consequently, a compromise of the woman’s physical and psychological well-being.

This broader picture frames the purpose of this contribution. Scenes from “As We See It” illustrate biases faced by families and caregivers. It is emblematic and consistent with the observations made thus far that only one scene addresses contraception – and only emergency contraception – in a plot otherwise centered on emotional and sexual relationships: it confirms the broader cultural underrepresentation of women with autism as reproductive agents.

### 3. The weight of ‘normality’ in “As We See It”.

The eight-episode comedy-drama series “As We See It”, directed by Jason Katims, follows the work, social, and emotional challenges of three roommates with autism living in Los Angeles.

Aligning with Wong’s reflection on the importance of cinematic representation of disability, blogger Nils Skudra observes that the series “makes a substantial step forward toward authentic representation and (...) can hopefully provide a model for future films and miniseries on autism.”<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, it fits into what, in recent years, has fortunately emerged as a genuine ‘genre’ of explicit representations of autism. For instance, recent series like “Atypical” and “Everything’s Gonna Be Okay” are now considered part of a “second generation,” compared to older shows like “Community,” “The Big Bang Theory,” and “Bones,” where characters were coded as being on the spectrum but never explicitly identified as such.

Moreover, the show has been well received by critics as a faithful portrayal of the struggles of three young adults and their families, aided by assistant Mandy (Sosie Bacon). I agree with this

<sup>20</sup> Medeghini 2015: 18. On this point, I refer to Bernardini 2016: 87-91. See also Carnovali 2018: 346.

<sup>21</sup> Ames et al. 2024: 546.e

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> Bergeer et al. 2013: 1151. See also Rippon 2025.

<sup>24</sup> Kopp and Gillberg 2011: 2875. It is important to specify that late autism diagnosis in women has a constitutively ambivalent meaning. On the one hand, it may function as a device of recognition and relief, allowing women to reread their lives “through a new lens” and, in some cases, to move from a “self-critical” to a more “self-compassionate” relation to the self. On this point, I refer to Leedham et al. 2020: 135; Wilson et al. 2023: 1336, Gibbs 2021. Clara Törnvall (2023) similarly describes diagnosis as “a huge relief,” since it allowed her to understand that she was not “a failed human being”. On the other hand, diagnosis may also operate as a stigmatizing label: Leedham et al. (2020: 135) identify the persistence of post-diagnostic “stereotyped assumptions”, while Botha, Dibb and Frost (2022: 427) observe that, although many participants with autism understood autism as “value neutral,” society “confers negative meanings onto autism, and thus, them”. Diagnosis should therefore be understood neither as simply emancipatory nor as merely oppressive, but as a threshold category: it can open self-understanding, community and access to support, while also exposing women with autism to ableist and gendered regimes of classification.

<sup>25</sup> Haney 2017: 54.

<sup>26</sup> Skudra 2022.

EXERCISING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS 'ATYPICALLY' AND 'INDEPENDENTLY.'

A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF "AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE" IN "AS WE SEE IT."

interpretation. A key strength is also the introduction of Violet, a female character with autism who is Asian and from a lower-middle-class background.

As journalist Clara Törnvall, herself with autism, observes: "the woman with autism is still an unknown subject in our time," usually depicted "as a copy of the nerdy male character."<sup>27</sup> Violet resists this stereotype, while her roommates Harrison and Jack – played by actors with autism Albert Rutecki and Rick Glassman – highlight different 'sides' of the spectrum, prompting viewers to rethink neurodiversity. The TV series thus introduces an element of "contradiction"<sup>28</sup> and contributes to what Monceri calls "a kind of compromise" within "American popular culture," connecting dominant frameworks with lived experience.<sup>29</sup>

However, despite its merits, certain grey areas limit its transformative impact.

Indeed, the title<sup>30</sup> itself immediately suggests a division between the subject "we" and the object "it", referring to autism. The subject is possibly interpretable as the neurotypical majority, including both the director and the audience. This opposition seems to echo the biomedical "subject-decider/object-decided"<sup>31</sup> logic that fueled institutionalization and still shapes laws, such as in Iowa and Nevada.

In this sense, the title fails to promote individual empowerment. This dichotomy intertwines with another issue. TV critic James Poniewozik writes indeed: "What's the problem with normal? (...) Normal is a goal, a dream, and maybe a myth."<sup>32</sup> I argue that this repeated framing remains problematic.

Indeed, the word 'normal' recurs throughout the series. Jack hides his diagnosis at work, fearing exposure, until misunderstandings lead to dismissal. Violet seeks validation from so-called 'normal' people; after sex with Jullien – a stock clerk at the fast-food restaurant where she works – she tells Harrison she "became a woman," as if intimacy with someone she sees as normal gave her new status. When Jullien later says it was only casual, her self-esteem collapses, and she confides in Mandy: "He told me I was pretty. That I was normal. But I'm not normal. It was all a lie."

Stepping into the shoes of Jack and Violet reveals how, in addition to the dichotomy in the title, the show constantly invokes the contrast between 'normality' and 'abnormality,' within which the autism of the three young adults is still framed. This becomes explicit in a scene where Violet's brother, Van (Chris Pang), during an argument, shouts that she is "not normal at all."

Every time the word 'normal' is used as an obvious, shared, desirable category, the series reinforces an implicit standard for what constitutes acceptable behavior, body, or mind.<sup>33</sup> This repetition sustains therefore an essentialist view: young adults with autism must adapt to society, never the reverse. The relational dimension of disability is ignored, and the 'norm' is naturalized rather than questioned.

<sup>27</sup> Törnvall 2023: 16.

<sup>28</sup> Hall 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem: 940.

<sup>30</sup> It could be noted that the "we" implied in the title *As We See It* cannot be directly and unequivocally identified with non-disabled people or, more specifically, with the non-autistic majority. The title remains semantically open and allows for different interpretations. However, as the analysis will show, several textual and paratextual elements seem to invite the approval, empathy, and partial complicity of the average viewer, thereby constructing a viewing position primarily oriented toward a non-autistic audience. These include the explanatory nature of certain scenes, the mediation of autistic experience through familial, therapeutic, or social perspectives, and narrative moments in which the viewer is invited to understand or approve the protagonists' adaptation to dominant relational norms. From this perspective, while alternative readings remain possible, *As We See It* may be read as an ambivalent title, in which the "we" tends to evoke a majority gaze rather than a fully autonomous subjectivity with autism.

<sup>31</sup> Bernardini 2021: 78.

<sup>32</sup> Skudra 2022.

<sup>33</sup> I'm referring to the mechanism of "performativity" explained in Butler 1990. She develops this concept to describe 'gender' not as an innate identity, but as an effect produced and reproduced through repeated acts, governed by social norms. Gender, in that sense, is not something one is, but something one does, constantly, over time.

Thus “As We See It,” despite its challenging intent, echoes the “hegemony of normality” critiqued by *Disability Studies*, presenting a comforting narrative – perhaps driven by visibility<sup>34</sup> and sharing logic – that diminishes the disruptive potential of its protagonists.<sup>35</sup>

At first glance, Mandy and Van’s development suggests sympathy, showing how the ‘normalizing’ life models they first uphold prove harmful. Both subvert their ‘norms:’ Mandy abandons a prestigious internship, realizing she learns from the young adults; Van moves from ‘authoritarian’ attitude to admitting mistakes with Violet. The finale, with sibling reconciliation and the three protagonists united around a ping-pong table, signals hope and affirms humanity and emotionality over normality: I believe it is commendable, as it introduces a ‘critical’ element into the narrative.

On closer inspection, these elements appear only at the end, affecting Mandy and Van more than the autistic characters themselves, who remain secondary. This suggests the “We” in the title may also refer to Mandy and Van, whose perspective on autism and normality changes through their romantic bond.

To stimulate deeper debate, I think these elements should have been presented as the ‘input,’ or at least more evenly distributed throughout the series. It remains bound to its initial focus on normality, a concept *Disability Studies* have critiqued since the 1990s through post-structuralist and feminist debates as socially and historically constructed. Showing Harrison, Jack, and Violet on different spectrum ‘sides’ fosters awareness of autism, yet the constant emphasis on normality risks giving viewers a misleading sense of closure, which I find counterproductive.

#### 4. Sexuality and Reproductive Rights of women with autism: the character of Violet.

The reflections on ‘normality’ extend to reproductive rights and sexuality, but with some important clarifications. This domain is indeed intimately linked to the kind of information the individual has access to, and the sexual education they receive – if any – whether at school, within the family, from society at large, or through peer interaction.

As Foucault shows, such education evolves with the “techniques” of sex imposed by power across history, differing by class.<sup>36</sup> This “technology of sex” operates on the basis of “normalization” rather than law, “control” rather than “punishment,” and “on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus”.<sup>37</sup> As such, the “normalizing power”, which was initially concentrated within legal, medical, and psychiatric institutions, has since diffused<sup>38</sup>: cultural products, marketing, social media, advertising, fashion, and influencer-generated content take on a truly ‘normative’ function. “American popular culture” reproduces this function as entertainment.

In this context, “As We See It” inherits from another series, “Parenthood”, a pedagogical stance. In both, director Jason Katims educates the public on disability but within values that implicitly prize adaptation to the norm. Known for shows like “Relativity” and “Friday Night Lights,” Katims drew on his son with autism when creating “Max” in “Parenthood.” This is relevant: many scenes in “As We See It” show parents and caregivers struggling with gaps in social, welfare, and legal support.

Yet this view reduces autism’s “transgressiveness”<sup>39</sup> to domestication, seeking constant ‘normalizing’ approval from the audience. This is particularly evident in sexuality and reproductive rights, where clichés recur, as in Violet and Van’s car conversation in episode one.

<sup>34</sup> On the relationship between ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’ for law see Tedeschi 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Medeghini 2015: 16-47. He recalls L. J. Davis’s concept of the “hegemony of normality”. For further insight, see Davis 2016 and Oliver 1990.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault 1978 [1976]: 119.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem: 89-90. Within contemporary feminist and posthumanist debate I refer to Donna Haraway’s critique of Foucault’s conception of power in 2006: 117–158. See also Braidotti 1994: 57.

<sup>38</sup> Foucault 2003: 56-59. About the influencer/law relationship see also Heritier 2024: 49.

<sup>39</sup> See Monceri 2012: 22. In disability studies, the “transgressive” force of bodies with disability is not understood as an intrinsic abnormality, but as their capacity to expose and unsettle the norms through which able-bodiedness and able-

**EXERCISING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ‘ATYPICALLY’ AND ‘INDEPENDENTLY.’  
A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF “AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE” IN “AS WE SEE IT.”**

Violet: Celeste (Violet’s friend) says I have good boobs, but they’re small, so I need lace bras. Do you think I have good boobs?

Van: Brothers and sisters don’t really talk about this kind of stuff, okay?

Violet: Why?

Van: Because...we just don’t talk about this kind of stuff. No. So don’t ever listen to Celeste about what to wear.

Violet: Why?

Van: You don’t want guys thinking you’re cheap, and they’ll expect stuff, and so you’d have to do stuff.

Violet: But I want to do stuff.

I believe Van’s embarrassment clearly highlights how the ‘normalizing’ paradigm is still very much in operation: it defines precise roles between men and women as well as within the family. It is evident that Van is unprepared to face his sister’s questions, which he perceives as excessive, almost obscene.

On one hand, the concern that his sister may find herself in situations she cannot control is legitimate: psychologist and sex educator Luisa Di Biagio, who is herself with autism, reports that approximately 78 per cent of individuals with a formal autism diagnosis have experienced sexual abuse. On the other hand, the exchange also reveals that Violet has not received sufficient education or guidance about sexuality. This mirrors the difficulties reported by researchers regarding access to contraception and routine checkups among autistic women, as discussed in the previous sections. Moreover, this issue becomes exponentially more serious due to the difficulties autism often causes in recognizing social and relational cues.

As Di Biagio explains: “no one teaches us to understand what we feel, and the only boundaries we are given are the countless ‘no,’ (...) which populate a confusing path”.<sup>40</sup> It follows that “something beautiful like affection, love, attraction, sex can turn into a nightmare”.<sup>41</sup> She points out the problem with interventions designed from a “typical perspective”: she stresses the importance for professionals to “de-typify”<sup>42</sup> themselves, including, where possible, professionals with autism themselves who understand neurodiversity from within. She specifically notes the need to provide clear instructions and action sequences that are recognizable and easily reproducible for the person: it is whether for intimate hygiene or to help channel sexual fantasies and impulses.

An example of this dynamic is perfectly embodied by Mandy. She appears attentive to the young adults’ emotional lives but the interventions she proposes are strongly ‘normalizing,’ as described by Di Biagio. For example, she insists on teaching Harrison to make eye contact, a practice that can actually be harmful for individuals with autism. Moreover, she often seems more intent on appeasing family expectations than on offering a professional opinion capable of challenging prejudices. In this sense, she embodies an educational model we might call – borrowing activist language – ‘typical-biased.’

The mentioned dialogue between Van and Violet is therefore an example of an approach to autism that is not only inattentive to “de-typify” itself, but also unaware of prejudices. Van’s reaction to Violet’s request to buy lace bras is one of the many noxious prohibitions Di Biagio describes. Violet’s sexual life is thus surveilled, controlled, and infantilized by both characters. This reflects a

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mindedness are constructed as natural, desirable, and universal. *Crip theory* reads disability as a critical position that destabilizes the “normate” subject and the regime of compulsory able-bodiedness (Garland-Thomson 1997: 8; McRuer 2006: 1–2). In *Autism Studies*, this critique is extended to neurological difference: neuroqueer approaches frame people with autism not as failed neurotypical subjects, but as subjects whose forms of embodiment, communication, desire, and agency disturb dominant expectations of cognition, relationality, and personhood (Yergeau 2018: 25–26; Kafer 2013: 1–24).

<sup>40</sup> Di Biagio 2019: 25.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem: 30–42. For an explanation of the concepts of “typical” and “atypical”, see footnote 11.

widespread stereotype about the sexuality of women with psychosocial disabilities, who are generally perceived either as “neutral” angels or, conversely, as dangerously “hypersexual” beings.<sup>43</sup> As a result, Violet’s character is denied the ‘transgressive’ and emancipatory potential that she would otherwise deserve.

##### 5. Between rhetoric of tenderness and fear of “abnormal” reproduction.

Another point must be added. Violet is not completely barred from sexuality: her brother and caregiver urge her to find a boyfriend in her disability theater class, while dating apps are strictly forbidden. At first, this seems a protective measure, given her difficulty with neurotypical social cues and related risks. Yet on screen it signals deeper issues: society’s unease with granting people with disabilities ‘full’ erotic agency. The series thus operates normatively, able to confirm or challenge these doubts, but its plot fails to truly question them.

Such reservations emerge in a ‘rhetoric’ of tenderness throughout “As We See It,” which devalues the protagonists’ bodies. Foucault captured this logic, noting fears around the reproduction of the “abnormals”: “individuals who (...) may (...) transmit to their heirs the unpredictable consequences of the evil.”<sup>44</sup>

Tragically, even professionals share these biases, as activist Sofia Righetti wrote on Instagram.<sup>45</sup> She recalls repeated episodes of “desexualization” and “body shaming.” As a child, a social worker told her that to have a boyfriend, she must first know him well so that “he could fall in love with her for who she was inside. They would need to become friends first, and only then might they begin dating.”

This shows how the ‘normalizing’ biopolitical mechanism, in Foucault’s sense, renders bodies with disability undesirable under an ‘ableist’ norm taken as self-evident. It affirms that life without disability is inherently better, regardless of social support, and denies free or mixed parenthood: the hidden message is that people with disability may be sexual, but only with each other.

Although never explicitly stated, this message is also never challenged by “As We See It”. It never supports Violet’s desire for ‘typical’ people, such as the Tinder date causing her fight with Van (section 3). While the show advances neurodiversity, its treatment of autistic female sexuality remains paternalistic. Instead, true “cultural citizenship” requires recognizing the disabled body as desiring, complex, valid, and adult.<sup>46</sup> Mandy tells Violet she was brave to date Jullien and that heartbreak is the most ‘normal’ thing, but these reflections appear only in a late episode. Had such reflections been the ‘input’ instead of the ‘output,’ they could have confronted the ‘normalizing’ paradigm, framing the issue as social, not just emotional.

As Judith Butler notes, when “precarity” is mistaken for “precariousness,” historical, social, and institutional issues risk being framed as ontological or universal emotions.<sup>47</sup> As Di Biagio stresses, society’s lack of responsibility for autistic sexuality is a social problem; failing to frame it this way blurs it with unrelated concerns, and the series does not avoid this risk.

Affirming desire, even in cinema, strongly impacts personal development: sexual fantasy helps build “existential coordinates” that shape orientation in peer groups and real-life.<sup>48</sup> Imagining enables resistance to legal, social, and behavioral ‘norms,’ supported by books, cinema, or social media.

<sup>43</sup> Carnovali 2018: 333.

<sup>44</sup> Foucault 2003: 316-317.

<sup>45</sup> Sofia Righetti, Instagram page, November 28, 2024.

<sup>46</sup> Monceri 2012: 22. On “cultural citizenship” I also suggest Miller 2006 and Stevenson 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Butler (2009: 14–25), by “precariousness,” refers to the fact “that life requires various social and economic conditions to be met in order to be sustained as a life” and that “its survival is dependent on what we might call a social network of hands”. “Precarity” “designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death”.

<sup>48</sup> Di Adamo 2022: 92.

## EXERCISING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ‘ATYPICALLY’ AND ‘INDEPENDENTLY.’

### A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF “AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE” IN “AS WE SEE IT.”

In addition, as anticipated in the previous sections, while many scenes depict emotions and sexuality, only one explicitly addresses reproductive rights: Van taking Violet to buy the morning-after pill as she cannot remember whether her sexual encounter with Jullien was protected. She is portrayed as confused, distressed, and in the throes of yet another panic attack. This seems like an exaggerated reaction for a woman with a low “level” of autism, which her character appears to embody.<sup>49</sup>

As Di Biagio notes, thousands of adults with mild autism work, love and raise children, often only discovering diagnosis later in life. The scene, therefore, appears aimed more at dramatization than realism. What truly deserves attention is how Violet was never given adequate sex education: not just contraception, but also practical and relational skills caregivers should teach. If this element is overlooked – along with the responsibilities families and caregivers must assume – then we fall back into the ‘hystericizing’ framework applied to women. Therefore, the series fails to show how Violet, if properly informed and prepared, could have exercised her right to emergency contraception independently, without needing her brother.

#### 6. Accessing reproductive rights to live “independently”: the ‘critical’ component of “As We See It.”

The discussion thus far highlights how the TV series addresses normality, reproductive rights, and sexuality: it also engages with *Disability Studies*, whose cultural impact challenges the ‘normalizing’ paradigm.

The 2006 *CRPD* indeed exemplifies how cultural change precedes legal change: disability became a public, justice-related issue. Its drafting drew on activism and lived experience – testimonies, movements, organizations, and scholars across jurisdictions – rooting the *Convention* in bodily and affective knowledge. Within this broader framework, the knowledge conveyed by “American popular culture” may not have had a direct influence, but it has certainly played an indirect role. Though rare, the more complex and realistic media portrayals of people with disabilities that began to emerge in the 1990s and 2000s helped shift public perceptions of disability, as noted by Wong.<sup>50</sup> For this reason, it is valuable to situate “As We See It” within the claim-making tradition of *Disability Studies*.

They contest indeed the “biomedical model,” exposing how ‘normality’ has been tied to ability, masculinity, and productivity, echoing Foucauldian insights on the “power of normalization.”<sup>51</sup> They also reoriented attention from impairment to social dimensions, informing the *CRPD*’s “bio-psycho-social” model: they promoted deinstitutionalization to expand autonomy, a priority reaffirmed by the *European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030*.<sup>52</sup>

This historical and juridical background is particularly relevant when analyzing the TV series. Indeed, “As We See It” explicitly references the concept of “independently living” through a speech between Mandy and Harrison’s mother. The concept names *Article 19* (*CRPD*), and thus carries specific legal significance. It is reflected in the living arrangement shared by Harrison, Jack, and Violet: the right to choose where, how, and with whom to live, without being forced into a particular arrangement, and with the necessary support, such as personal assistance.

<sup>49</sup> For an explanation of the different ‘levels’ of autism I refer to *DSM-5* (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*).

<sup>50</sup> This aspect has been deepened accurately in Ellcessor and Kirkpatrick 2017: 76.

<sup>51</sup> The “bio-medical model” views disability as an individual deficit or pathology in contrast to the “bio-psycho-social” model adopted by the *CRPD* that entails a comprehensive vision of the individual. On the point see Marchisio and Curto 2020, Latti 2022, Morazio and Pollio 2023. For a critical commentary on the “ICF” as an operational formalization of the “bio-psycho-social” model see Monceri 2025: 178-204.

<sup>52</sup> For the connection between the *CRPD* and the “bio-psycho-social model”, see WHO, *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*, 2001, which formalizes it.

As mentioned, the *CRPD* has been signed but not ratified by the United States. Anyway, Titles II and III of the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*, along with Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act* prohibit discrimination by public and federally funded entities. In this way, these legal texts embody the spirit of “independently living” through provisions aimed at promoting accessibility and self-determination.

Notably, the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *Olmstead v. L.C.* (1999) states that “unjustified isolation is properly regarded as discrimination based on disability.” Specifically, this decision established that the “most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of individuals with disabilities” – as provided by *ADA* regulation 28 CFR § 35.130(d) – constitutes a foundational principle of U.S. anti-discrimination law in the field of disability.<sup>53</sup> It mandates a legal preference for inclusive housing, care, and support solutions, aligned with the logic of Article 19 *CRPD*.

Therefore, the portrayal of the three young adults living together with the support of their caregiver, Mandy, aligns with the American legal framework. More than that, by explicitly referencing “independently living,” the series brings to mind the *Independent Living Movement*, which emerged in California – where the show is set – following the advocacy efforts of disability rights activist Ed Roberts in the 1960s. In this sense, the TV series can be interpreted as a contemporary cultural and political ‘legacy’ of that movement.

The critiques raised in the previous sections regarding the representation of Violet’s reproductive rights and the need to “de-typify” the education received by women with autism should therefore be understood within this broader context, as a specific aspect of the larger right to “living independently.”

The TV series gives voice to this complexity in contrasting ways. On the one hand, its title and focus on ‘normality’ replicate old caregiver/cared-for dynamics, offering comfort rather than challenging social clichés. On the other hand, it also conveys critical content: by depicting diverse points on the autism spectrum, it questions audience assumptions and, through its ending, emphasizes humanity over normalization. Familial and affective bonds become central, resonating with the “affective turn” in cultural and legal theory.<sup>54</sup> This is a compelling and powerful element.

Indeed, Violet and Van’s unconventional family offers a valuable lesson to other characters showing that genuine, non-normative connection arises from self-determination and free expression of desires. Even more significantly, by portraying this, the series implicitly offers its media support to an alternative housing model – non-institutionalized living – that aligns with the legal advances made in both American and international disability law (*CRPD*.) In addition, *General Comment No. 5 (2017) of the CRPD Committee* explicitly lists “empowering parenthood” among the aims of personal support services. Moreover, in *Bragdon v. Abbott*, 524 U.S. 624 (1998), the Supreme Court ruled that reproduction qualifies as “a major life activity according to *Americans with Disabilities Act* of 1990.” Yet, as Sections 1 and 2 showed, these protections clash with restrictive U.S. policies on women’s reproductive rights. Women with disabilities, and particularly those with autism, face barriers in healthcare access and intersecting discrimination, worsened by diagnostic delays and eugenic-inspired legislation.

While the series could have paid more attention to these issues, its emancipatory potential ultimately lies in the interplay between the cohabitation choice of the three young adults with the support of a caregiver, and their emotional and relational stories. Indeed, when Van seeks to institutionalize Violet for protection, she resists. Ultimately, Violet secures the right to remain in the shared house, and familial harmony is restored through her affirmation of self-determination.

Therefore, the ending underscores that an ‘independent’ life is inseparable from emotional, familial, and sexual autonomy.

<sup>53</sup> ADA regulation 28 CFR § 35.130(d).

<sup>54</sup> The “affective turn” in metaphysics and in the *Law and Humanities* signifies a paradigm shift in which affectivity and emotions are recognized as central elements of legal, ethical, and ontological experience. See Sequeri 2016.

**EXERCISING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ‘ATYPICALLY’ AND ‘INDEPENDENTLY.’  
A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF “AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE” IN “AS WE SEE IT.”**

### 7. A lack of intersectionality.

If it is undeniable that the series takes up some of the key demands of *Disability Studies* it still lacks an intersectional perspective on the specific experiences of women with disabilities.

As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson notes, “a feminist disability theory builds on the strengths of both *Disability Studies* and (...) Feminist Theory.”<sup>55</sup> According “to the larger *Civil Rights Movement* that informed it,” the approach of *Feminist Disability Studies* is indeed essential to understand the discrimination faced by women with disabilities, as discussed in Section 2.

Furthermore, these reflections should be linked to the emerging field of *Critical Autism Studies*, which offers valuable insights on reproductive rights and sexuality for women with autism.<sup>56</sup> By questioning the assumed validity of ‘typical’ communication and interaction, they propose alternative, equally legitimate ways of making meaning. These approaches inevitably affect a person’s emotional life, yet they remain absent in “As We See It.”

As I have explained, Violet’s desires are not recognized as legitimate, nor her body as sexually valid, reflecting denied reproductive rights; the ban on dating outside the disability theater group exemplifies this. She is also denied “affirmative” content to counter typical-biased narratives:<sup>57</sup> her social media use centers on heteronormative material, excluding the diverse community of female influencers with autism who could support her growth. Her experience thus remains ‘inactive,’ detached from the broader movements that, in reality, might empower and inspire her and her peers.

There is now discussion of an “autistic culture,”<sup>58</sup> a shared set of cognitive, perceptual, and experiential traits across the spectrum. *Autism Studies* scholars urge its inclusion in broader cultural narratives to promote “situated knowledge”<sup>59</sup> in media, highlighting the emancipatory value of lived experience. The series, however, ignores this potential and misses the chance for integration.

This is evident in the aforementioned dialogue between Van and Violet: Van’s unease with bras and his concern about male perception reinforce mainstream authority, while Violet’s marginal view adapts. The show reproduces gendered norms and a very traditional division between male and female objects, without exploring alternative meanings.<sup>60</sup>

The bra could symbolize Violet’s relation to her body and confidence, or, it could be a symbolic object: Donna Williams, an activist with autism, found her orientation in the world through the positioning of cherished items.<sup>61</sup> There are many other meanings attached to the bra in feminist debate, but the series does not leave any space for alternative and feminine significations distinct from the ‘typical’ one. Thus, it gives interpretive power to a 29-year-old neurotypical, heterosexual man assuming the role of the absent “Father,”<sup>62</sup> echoing theories on normativity’s genealogy, where authority rests in the power to assign meaning.

### 8. From Violet to Kristeva.

In order to address the lack of representation of the female autistic perspective and to break into the ‘typical’ discursive universe – embodied by Van – I believe that Julia Kristeva’s conception of

<sup>55</sup> Garland-Thomson 2022: 1.

<sup>56</sup> Valtellina 2020: 11.

<sup>57</sup> I’m referring to the concept of “affirmative ethics” in Braidotti 2011: 267.

<sup>58</sup> Di Biagio 2019: 88.

<sup>59</sup> Haraway 1988: 575-599.

<sup>60</sup> Verdu Sanmartin 2020: 116-119

<sup>61</sup> See Williams 1998.

<sup>62</sup> The reference is to the “Father” in the Lacanian reconstruction of normativity, as explained in paragraph 8 in relation to Julia Kristeva’s reconstruction.

the “Chora” and the “Semiotic,” developed from the ideas of De Saussure, Freud, and Lacan, can offer a valuable theoretical framework. She reworks Lacanian thought.

Jacques Lacan argues that an individual becomes a “Subject” through the transition from the “Imaginary” to the “Symbolic,” a process initiated within the family structure by the Father’s prohibition of the child’s incestuous desire for the Mother.<sup>63</sup> This prohibition – interpreted in line with medieval canonist Pierre Legendre – marks entry into the social and institutional order, through adherence to the paternal “Symbolic” Law, encapsulated in the “Name-of-the-Father.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, access to language, and thus to the power of naming and assigning meaning, coincides with access to normativity.

Kristeva, instead, anticipates the presence of normativity at a stage prior to the “Symbolic,” introducing the “ordering principle of the semiotic *Chora*”, which is mediated by the Mother.<sup>65</sup> The mother serves as the initial interface for the child, later facilitating access to the Father’s “Symbolic” Law. What is particularly interesting is not only this anticipation of the normative, but also the introduction of an additional element.

For Lacan, the “unconscious” is merely “structured like a language.”<sup>66</sup> For Kristeva, by contrast, it also includes a pre-linguistic, fluid, and pulsional dimension, the “semiotic” one.<sup>67</sup>

In other words, for Lacan, “the *minus* (or loss) [is] on the side of the signifying order itself (which emerges with-without one signifier).”<sup>68</sup> For Kristeva, otherwise, the “Semiotic” already contains “the negativity necessary for the emergence of subjectivity.”<sup>69</sup>

This difference results in two distinct understandings of how the individual becomes a “Subject”. It is particularly relevant in the context of the series, which concerns the journey toward independent adulthood. For Lacan, subjectivity is fully constituted once access to the “Symbolic” has occurred. This also implies rigidity, a placement within clearly defined boundaries. Kristeva, by contrast, anticipating post-structuralist theories (e.g., Derrida and Butler) and contemporary feminist thought, introduces the notion of the “subject-in-process”:<sup>70</sup> an individual is continually shaped by re-emergences of the “semiotic,” which give rise to tensions between language, the body, and the unconscious.

This is relevant for three reasons. First, because the subject becomes diffractive, potentially legitimizing other ways of being in the world, including ‘atypical’ ones. Second, because it reminds us that the “Semiotic” is part of everyone’s development: it thereby dismantles the ableist, polarized conception of the deciding subject / decided object that has underpinned the biomedical tradition of disability. Finally, because the subject does not have to be legitimized by the Father’s “Symbolic” Law in order to generate meaning: the maternal, pre-linguistic semiotic dimension is already meaningful in itself.

This notion holds powerful ‘de-institutionalizing’ potential. It means that the assignment of meaning can no longer be considered the exclusive domain of Van, or of the neurotypical majority he represents.

Moreover, Kristeva’s conception of the Subject and of the “Semiotic” may carry an even deeper potential for “reform.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, it implies a constitutive vulnerability that re-emerges in the form of the “Semiotic” and the “abject”, a vulnerability experienced by everyone during childhood when

<sup>63</sup> See Lacan 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Lacan 1993: 273.

<sup>65</sup> Kristeva 1984: 27. See also Heritier 2023: 15.

<sup>66</sup> Lacan 1978: 20.

<sup>67</sup> Kristeva 1984: 27.

<sup>68</sup> Zupančič 2017: 48.

<sup>69</sup> Oliver 1993: 44.

<sup>70</sup> Kristeva 1984: 131.

<sup>71</sup> Oliver 1993: 101.

dependent on parental care.<sup>72</sup> Following the path opened by Kristeva thus does not mean adopting a paternalistic tone, into which, unfortunately, some scenes in the TV series do fall. It rather means restoring value to the "Semiotic" as a permanent component of subjectivity alongside the "Symbolic." It means recognizing it as the original seat of meaning, which is not initially linguistic but rather corporeal, sonic, energetic, and impulsive.

To the extent that the relevance of these components of experience is acknowledged by the "ordering" of the maternal "Chora," they acquire clear philosophical and legal significance.<sup>73</sup> They stand in contrast to the dominant rationalist model of knowledge – inherited from formalist traditions, including American ones – which separates the thinking subject from their embodied presence, *logos* from its biological and material traces.

On the one hand, this implies that the bodily testimonies of community members must be recognized as legally relevant in American law; among them, the testimonies of women with autism offer a critical perspective that challenges certain assumptions deemed universal, yet whose universality is precisely their flaw. On the other hand, such testimonies inform specialists about perceptual and relational differences, supporting "de-typified" approaches (Di Biagio.) A perceptual 'jump' can create new meaning, altering the link between signifier and value, implying alternative cognitive connections with effects on sexuality and reproductive rights.

Finally, Kristeva's focus on the impulsive, rhythmic "Semiotic" helps validate communication by non-verbal individuals: through echolalia, stimming, symbolic objects, or unusual gestures, common in Level 3 autism that requires "very substantial" support under *DSM-5*. In particular, Isabella Guanzini links Kristeva's "Chora" – the pulsional, rhythmic, and pre-linguistic dimension – to Lacan's "lalangue", discussed in Seminar XX.<sup>74</sup>

This connection shows how both authors introduce into their theories a language 'inhabited' by the body. By acknowledging the 'dialectical' relationship between the "Symbolic" and the "Semiotic," they implicitly validate the latter as a full-fledged form of communication. It follows that also non-verbal expression is to be recognized as a 'valid' form of communication: indeed, even when an individual enters the "Real" directly, without prior "Symbolic" access, this entrance refers anyway to an original way of constituting subjectivity, both 'typical' and 'atypical.' That is what happens in case of intellectual disability and of Level 3 autism.

Activist and scholar Melanie Yergeau enriches this view, showing how "autistic rhetoric" and "autistexts" resist linguistic hegemony by re-signifying texts.<sup>75</sup> Echolalia, far from disorder, becomes rewriting through repetition and affective-pulsional shifts. This meaning-making, opposing the mainstream (Van's stance), represents an atypical form of "intertextuality." While Kristeva defines it as "transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another", the autistic system can also be included, acting as a "semiotic" co-agent alongside the "Symbolic."<sup>76</sup>

Thanks to Kristeva and Lacan, "intertextuality" extends beyond the textual to bodily and affective realms. Through "autistic culture," it can enter discourse and practice, including "American popular culture," of which the series is part.

Therefore, the fact that "As We See It" neither includes nor references the perspectives of activists, influencers, and scholars from the *Autism Studies* and *Feminist Disability Studies* unfortunately involves two consequences: it confirms a lack of representation and reinforces the concerns, raised

<sup>72</sup> Kristeva 1982 defines "abjection" as a psychic process in which the subject expels what is perceived as impure, threatening, or other in order to constitute itself.

<sup>73</sup> Kristeva 1984: 25.

<sup>74</sup> I'm referring to Lacan 1998: he associates "lalangue" with a different logic from that of the signifier, which dominated his earlier thought, and problematizes it in relation to the concept of the "Real:" that is for Lacan what 'resists' symbolization and remains outside meaning, that means outside the transposition from "Imaginary" to "Symbolic." See also Guanzini 2024: 1-23.

<sup>75</sup> Yergeau 2018: 24.

<sup>76</sup> Kristeva 1984: 59.

in the earlier paragraphs, regarding the difficult access to reproductive rights for women with disabilities in the United States.

Although the series effectively conveys the importance of implementing “independently living” and does carry a ‘critical’ message in that regard, it fails to adequately explore how the affective dimension also plays out in this area: indeed, it is deeply connected to the individual’s “Semiotic” experience.

The hope is that, as the bodily narratives of women with autism become increasingly organized, widespread, and popular, their demands will be represented with growing accuracy on screen. In this way, they can help raise awareness among legal, political, and institutional actors, within systems that still pose many barriers to a sexually ‘independent’ life.

In addition, these also serve as support for those “existential coordinates,” even imaginary, which each person cultivates internally: despite the critiques presented here, “As We See It” has gently introduced to them. This ‘space’ represents a horizon of possibilities and anticipation for concrete future actions and therefore takes on a genuinely reformist character, with the potential to impact reproductive rights and the practical implementation thereof.

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## A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF "AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE" IN "AS WE SEE IT."

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