

TRANSFEMINISM

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THE ENTANGLEMENTS BETWEEN queer, trans and feminist complicate the investigation of transfeminism and its genealogies, with particular attention to the continental dimension. Transfeminism is understood here not as a monolithic theoretical concept but rather as a field of practices and discourses, cultures and desires, struggles, and locations. The European, and Southern-European in particular, expression of the field is certainly less codified than its Anglo-American counterpart, yet we argue it is precisely its blurriness, situated and anti-institutional character that allows transfeminism to be a useful keyword to queer the 2020s. Transfeminism is a keyword indeed, an instance of the many iterations of trans as a troubling agent. “Trans-” is the “evil twin” (Stryker 2004) of many academic areas of inquiry and political cultures, less definitive than “post-,” it nonetheless indicates a displacement, a pressure on boundaries, an expansive move (Stryker et al. 2008). Transgender, in particular, invites us to confront nothing less than the limits of our desires and the gender binary infrastructure that sustains them. The term transfeminism is also marked by a capacity to be situated and very specific to the conditions of its emergence and use (Bettcher and Stryker 2016).

On the one hand, in the Anglophone area, transfeminism is understood as a political standpoint of inclusion of trans women into the liberation struggles of all women. In this sense, transfeminism is mainly aimed at the participation of trans women into feminism and their

access to feminist spaces. Anglo-American feminisms have indeed a long infamous history of exclusion of trans women from women-only spaces (Stone 1991): anti-trans beliefs of certain feminists condemn trans women experiences as invalid and invasive, and likewise sanctions trans masculine people as “traitors who buy into the temptation of masculine privilege and nothing more” (Salamon 2008, 129). Conversely, the most popular, and amongst the earliest, call for transfeminism in the Anglophone area, is indeed a manifesto where transfeminism is understood as “a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond” (Koyama 2016, 244).

The inclusion of trans perspectives into feminist politics is not, however, merely a matter of assimilation of certain identities into a given community, but of the recognition of shared needs, intersecting axes of oppression, projects of emancipation and coalition building. In particular, autonomy and self-determination – on one’s own body and wellbeing – may inform feminist and trans politics alike. They sustain different choices for women, and allow diversity in the forms of life womanhood and femininity can take; as such, bodily self-determination is a cross-cutting issues for all women.

The investment into intersectionality and materialist implications of transfeminism are more evident in the European and Latin American genealogy and application of the term. Here, since the early 1990’, radical sex subcultures of collectives, squats, post-porn performers, hackers, sex-workers, migrants, queer activists, expressed a theoretical and political capital often overlooked by institutional queer and trans studies. Transfeminist politics informed autonomous, anti-institutional, direct action politics not only on trans liberation, but also more broadly about gender-based violence, sex-work decriminalization, reproductive rights, homonationalism and migration, anti-austerity critiques of neoliberalism, gentrification, and assimilationist gay and lesbian politics.

Originally stemming from the Spanish context (Solá and Urko 2013), transfeminist networks gained widespread international traction after the publication and translation in several languages of the “Manifesto

para la Insurrección Transfeminista,” authored by the network Puta-BolloNegraTransFeminista in 2009. Some actors in the circulation of these ideas beyond Spain are in France Le Zoo’s Q seminars and the trans collective Outrans (Espineira and Bourcier 2016). In Italy, the Sommovimento NazioAnale (National Anal Agitation) that started in 2012, is the earliest local attempt to consolidate a transfeminist network of collectives (Baldo 2019).

Transfeminism does maintain a specific focus on transgender politics. In fact, hundreds of collectives joined in 2009 the Spanish-initiated Stop Trans Depathologization (STP) campaign. To this day, STP is a transnational platform campaigning for the removal of the classification of gender transition processes as a mental disorder from the diagnostic manuals, as well as advocating for universal trans health care based on an informed consent model, legal gender recognition, and the combat and prevention of transphobic violence. This radical, anti-assimilationist transgender politic, shares with queer a broader, fundamental investment into anti-normative politics of sexuality. Transphobia is here understood as a consequence of heteronormativity and the binary gender system that sustains its hierarchies. This method of systemic critique borrows from queer theory the invitation to reclaim the marginality and perversity of an oppressed subject position, and queer politics empowers the production of genders that resist compulsory heterosexuality and its gender norms.

Transfeminism may be understood in relation not only to second-wave feminism but also to queer. The term transfeminism allows for a localized creation of political vocabulary (*transféminisme* [fr], *transfeminismo* [es], *transfemminismo* [it]). The term queer, instead, travels untranslated and as such remains always partially foreign to local political cultures (Bassi 2017). Critiques of early reception of queer theory in non-anglophone contexts (e.g. Arfini and Lo Iacono 2012), highlighted how not translating queer not only left behind the possibility to reclaim the performative potential of a derogatory term, but also invited interpretations of queer as a disembodied, non-descript, and hyper-theoretical standpoint imposed by American cultural imperialism.

Rooted in collective micropolitical actions and in networks of material and affective support, transfeminism can be understood as an example of queer materialism, particularly in its analysis of gender(ed) labor. The genealogy of this analysis can be traced back to the 1970s and the Wages for Housework (WFH) campaign (Dalla Costa and James 1973) and to the Italian post-workerist school of thought (Marazzi 2011). From these traditions, Italian transfeminism in particular has borrowed critiques of gendered division of labor and later those of the contemporary feminization of productive work conditions (organized according to standards of reproductive one, such as multitasking, fragmentation, precariousness, emotional labor, etc.) (Morini 2010). Italian Non Una di Meno – currently the main national feminist grassroots movement – participated in the 2017 International Women’s Strike (joined by seventy countries globally and fuelled by the Argentinian #NiUnaMenos campaign) and refined the political imagination of the gender strike. The renewed attention by Southern transfeminism to Marxist-inspired material feminisms (at its time subaltern to the then hegemonic, French-centered, sexual difference thought) can be seen as a queer historical impulse (Dinshaw 1999, 1), but also as a substantial resonance of political frames. Indeed, as much as the WFH campaign aimed at denaturalizing care work by claiming a wage *for* housework as a strategy *against* housework, the figuration of a gender strike promises to liberate gender labor from its alienation. Understanding the creation of gender itself as work, as labor that can be alienated but also as value that can be reclaimed, has a potential perhaps not yet entirely refined on the theoretical level, but already fully operational as a political tool.

Reflecting on our futures within the horizon of one decade, the 2020s, might seem short-sighted when compared to reflections on the anthropocene, post-industrial society, climate breakdown, or the end of patriarchy. However, the generative potential of “trans-” in the last decade alone has shown no signs of exhaustion. In the theoretical and academic field, the transsexual was “post-” in 1991 and “postpost-” by 2014, when the first issue of the *Transgender Studies Quarterly* was published (“Postposttranssexual: Key Concepts for a Twenty-First Century

Transgender Studies”). The same journal in 2019 is already publishing scholars debating on the end of trans studies (Chu and Drager 2019). Likewise, at the phenomenological and political practices level, transfeminism travels globally as way to critically address expressions of both violence and pleasures at the intersection with gender binarism. Transfeminism embraces “trans-” without appropriating it as a mere metaphor for relationality or anti-normativity, and rather materializes the situatedness of feminist struggles.

The call for a transfeminist insurrection begins with the acknowledgement that we all do gender. To release this inescapable labor from the inequalities, exclusions and violence that it justifies, and to make it instead an experience of pleasure and liberation, feminism needs to imagine a radical politics of gender and sexuality that will be trans, or it won't be.

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