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we
the LESBIANS.

Female preference and the critique of transfeminism.

IL DITO E LA LUNA

WE, THE LESBIANS
Female preference and the critique of transfeminism

ISBN 978-88-86633-74-1
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Graphic Design and Layout by Il Dito e La Luna
First edition Il Dito e la Luna (The Finger and the Moon): April 2021

English translation
by Maggie Woman Leigh

WE, THE LESBIANS

Female preference and the critique of transfeminism

Queer theories? much in them is true and new:
what is true is not new and what is new is not true.
(anonymous woman)

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1. Foreword

We decided to write this document on September 15th, 2019, the last day of our sixth Summer School gathering, which is an annual event organized by ArciLesbica. Looking out at a sparkling sea, we were evaluating how we had done. We liked the place and we had gotten along well with each other. We had met the challenge of reading many texts, yet they didn't seem to fit us, or to be focused enough on our issues. We must write something ourselves! We must write as lesbians: we, the lesbians!

Statements representing the majority in the lgbt movement, as well as those of transfeminists, do not reflect us. During these months we read some good critical articles, though they were mostly in other languages. Some basic tenets from second wave feminism still provide us with essential guiding points. However, we are living in today s world: we want to think over what is happening in our times and be activists in the here and now. That is why we decided to write about several issues having to do with subjectivation[1], specifically lesbian subjectivation; about our experience as lesbians, about the way in which the struggle for rights is being used, and about the discrepancy between justice and individuality.

The theoretical standpoint on which we base our analysis is lesbian feminism. Our field of research is limited to the lgbt movement and to feminism in Italy, even though inevitably, in our interconnected world, controversies in other countries soon reach us and become part of the debate here. We had many discussions as we worked for months, reading books and articles and even posts on social media, and we based our work on our shared history. ArciLesbica is well over twenty years old: as innumerable events have taken place, those of us who experienced them have gone back over them and analyzed them several times with women who joined us later, enabling all of us as a group to develop a common language. We have also added personal testimonies that present a multi-faceted image of what it is that matters to us in lesbian politics.

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1. Subjectivity is the process whereby people recognize themselves as individual and collective subjects in relationship with other people

We have named the female body and lesbian desire using the words of lesbian feminism: these are utterly different from the words of queer and transfeminism, which neither represent nor convince us. The theories which for some years now, have been promoted by the majority of the lgbt movement, put us at risk of being erased as subjects, as well as erasing knowledge of the history of lesbians, which with great effort has been wrenched from oblivion in the course of time. Behind the speeches about the liberation of non-conforming and non-binary subjectivities, we perceive the male experience taking center stage. We observe the clearance sale of our precious feminist heritage, of feminist thought , rooted in history, grounded in the knowledge and practice of all the many women who banded together and fought against patriarchal power, conquering spaces of freedom for themselves and for each other.

Queer theorists have made disappear the L from the movement, they have suffocated our radicality[2]. But it hasn t always been this way and it won t necessarily be this way in the future. We, the lesbians, intend to remain so: we do not want to be lesbians+, lesbicx, queer, gender-fluid, non-binary, gay or anything else[3]. The word that we believe defines us, as well as all women who love and prefer women, is lesbian .

The word lesbian retains its power to throw things into disarray: that s why many lesbians are still unable to claim this term as their own. In the course of time, we have heard the most varied reasons why women choose to avoid this way of naming themselves. At present even academic culture has provided convenient reasons for discarding the term: it s seen as too old, too much about identity, too rigid in a fluid society. We add: too exclusively female?

We have happily taken on the political responsibility for our lesbian subjectivity, and this gives us a constituent power: that of being and declaring

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2. Even the theories proposed by lesbian feminism, in Italy as well as other countries, are being interpreted by queer theorists as precursors of transfeminism. Just look at the re-reading of Monique Wittig or of Italian documents such as Il Nostro Mondo Comune (Our Shared World) by C.L.I. (Connecting Italian lesbians), Felina Publishers, 1983.

3. ArciLesbica positions itself not only as one of the few non-neoliberal voices within an ever more mainstreamed lgbt movement, but also as
one of the few remaining lesbian voices.

ourselves to be the lesbian subject that other women have abandoned. We are certain that the strength of this affirmation will be an attractive proposition for many other lesbians. This is where make our stand, in order to live our lives and, quite possibly, to change the world.

We believe that women who love women are not mainly defined by their transgression of sexual norms, but by the fact that they choose other women as companions. We like to be among women. While separatism is often useful as a political strategy, separatism as a way of life is a pleasure that we are not willing to forgo.

That s why the word lesbian is deeply and totally ours and we are positively happy to share it with the women who recognize themselves in this word, experiencing no old or new shame. Our analysis and our lives begin here: we are lesbians, we are the lesbians.

2 We, the lesbians

2.1 Human beings of the female sex

We are human beings, our sex is female, the same as our mothers, the women who birthed us.
We became lesbians and we chose to accept this; that is, we found ourselves admiring and desiring another woman, and this was not limited to a one-time experience. We are capable of respecting and feeling affection for some men, but we do not desire them.
The goal of loving someone like ourselves, of the female sex, was a forbidden one, fraught with obstacles and punishments without end, but we took the risk of living according to our preference. Before reaching this goal, many of us fought internally against ourselves. We found it difficult to understand ourselves, since we could not find any representations of love between women around us. In addition, we lived in fear of being discovered, which might lead to being deprived of freedom, of love, of respect. Finally, we were left with the enduring feeling that we were strange, insignificant. In order to salvage the most important thing, the pleasure of being alive, we refused to give up, and we prevailed, obtaining what is given to heterosexuals without a struggle: the right to love, to choose and to prefer, and to speak about it openly. For us, talking about our daily life has meant, and still does, revealing ourselves, in a solemn coming out; making the exhausting effort that this entails even today, when coming out has become more commonplace.
In order to validate our feelings and our aspirations, even as little girls we had to fight against gender stereotypes: those cultural expectations were considered normal and they burdened us as females, for they kept us from expressing ourselves spontaneously as the human beings we are.
So, what do lesbians have in common? We were born female and every one of us has been able to imagine the inconceivable thought of loving another woman; all of us have known how to disobey the prohibition and have experienced a beautiful, unexpected relationship, that of two women choosing each other to love; every single one of us has had great strength. The women s movement, as well as the lgbt movement, have provided, in different ways, some of the intellectual and emotional resources we needed along the way; however, these were not sufficient: we

have had to dig deep, to count on ourselves.
Women are marked by a wound that is the effect of humiliations specifically reserved for us, in all areas of our lives. This pain might have turned into self-mutilation and the idealization of power and dominance, it has transformed instead into the indomitable strength to struggle, to invent practical ways to live differently.
What does a woman want when she desires another woman? Who am I, when I desire a woman? These are the questions which have defined us. Society at large is not prepared to understand a woman who is searching for happiness with and through another woman, both human beings devalued by men.
What we mean by the search for happiness is the effort to feel fulfilled as creative being , feeling one is not alone, having the capacity for joy, having a sense of the material and spiritual cycle of life: and experiencing this together with another woman, in a community of women. We consciously want to be a part of female genealogy.
We have recovered the capacity to choose what to do and what not to do for our own good. We make our choices in our own name and in the name of those women who were and are being deprived of that choice.
We place ourselves outside of the field of male desire: gay, trans, bisexuals, gender fluid, and heterosexual people do not. Since we are unavailable to men in their search for pleasure, we are ignored or mocked, yet this does not faze us. We are threatened when we dare to unmask male demands and privilege. We are not at the service of other people s goals, for the meaning of a woman s life isn t serving anyone s else s goals nobody s meaning in life is serving anyone else s goals.

2.2 Patriarchy and heteronormativity

The deconstruction of gender stereotypes, which consists in unraveling coercive cultural norms, a good thing, has led one area of feminism to take on as accepted truth that a woman only exists as performance, substituting the concept of patriarchy/fratriarchy with that of heteronormativity. What we mean by patriarchy/fratriarchy is a society based on male dominance, while heteronormativity means a society based on heterosexual dominance, which places whoever is not heterosexual in an abject position.

The subjects of the struggle against patriarchy/fratriarchy are women, because women demolish their idealized subjugation by acquiring a feminist consciousness which they then pass on to subsequent female generations.
The subject of the struggle against heteronormativity are the queer (trans, gay, lesbian, gender fluid, etc.) who glamorize what is abject and who propose to young people a paradigm of sexual freedom that goes against the norm and that is neutral.
Patriarchy can be renamed fratriarchy after the emancipation of women. It has been many years since patriarchy changed its appearance. It no longer looks like the authoritarian and oppressive father figure of long ago: now it looks like a seductive, libertine brother. At least in the Western world, he no longer lays claim to female bodies as a natural right. In order to gain access, he needs to buy or to seduce. The old dialectic of victim-oppressor that characterized the old patriarchy now plays itself out in the arena of rights and freedoms. This of course does not mean that the old forms of oppression have entirely disappeared. Although it seemed that, in a world of brothers, male control of female reproduction and pleasure had come to an end, back it comes disguised as the demand to legislate wombs for hire, as the attempt to treat women s bodies like human capital to be invested in order to make a profit (prostitution, pornography, the biotech marketplace, advertising.)
The economic system demands access to bodies, which are seen as objects to be consumed. We still have a society that is divided based on sex, where males are taking possession of the offspring and exploiting females, crushing them through material and cultural violence into a subordinate position, into a mass that will provide reproductive, sexual and caretaking services and be purveyors of comfort and support. Human beings deprived of goals of their own.
Heteronormativity exists and is coercive and causes pain; traditional femininity and masculinity are constricting to many people. However, rebelling against this has roots, possibilities and meaning that differ, depending on who is doing the rebelling, whether it is a woman or a man. The patriarchal/fratriarchal system is harmful first to women and secondly to all other subjects. There can be synergy between the different groups of those who disobey the social-sexual contract, but as far as we are concerned this is desirable only if it does not entail new forms of the erasure

of women, who are then absorbed and remodeled by hegemonic male discourse, this time under a queer disguise.

2.3 The reality principle

Many mtf[4] people date their identification as a female back to early childhood. They act seductively, they speak of experiences of occasional sex occurring repeatedly, some freely chosen[5], some under force; they are constantly and excessively seeking the male gaze: in short, this is everything that lesbians push away. On the contrary, the biographies of lesbians are full of the traits that one finds in the stories of ftms lives: being a tomboy as a child, preferring competitive sports, choosing challenging jobs and professions, dressing to look assertive, foregoing frills, and other ways of being that have traditionally identified men. The butch is an important figure in lesbian history: she was the woman dressed in male attire who attended gay bars in America in the nineteen fifties: in earlier times, she was the woman who passed as a man in order to have an independent life[6].
Even though we see similar biographical elements in the lives of some lesbians and ftm s lives, these life stories differ depending on whether the principle of reality prevails or not. Some of us had a childhood dream of being male so we could enjoy a life that would harmonize with our adventurous self. This dream faded as we realized we were female, so we had to come up with other strategies to live our lives adventurously: for example, by becoming lesbians. If we had not taken stock of the evidence of our female sex, the dream might have continued until adulthood and resulted in our taking action to change our physical selves, not just chan-

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4. Mtf: male to female (people born male who feel they have a female “gender identity”, whereas ftm means the opposite).
5. P. Marcasciano, Among roses and violets, Manifestolibri, 2002
6. Joan Nestle, Lesbian Relationships. Sexual courage in the Fifties , or “The butch and the femme” in DWF Forbidden love. American research on lesbian existence, 1985: Lilian Faderman “Butch, femme and kiki: the creation of lesbian subcultures in the Fifties and Sixties”, in A History just for us, ed. Margherita Giacobino, Il Dito e la luna, 2006. Today these precedents are also being disputed between queer and lesbians.

ging the performance of our bodies.
We are relieved we did not transition our bodies; we lament the risks to health that transitioning entails. We respect those who have made that choice, both ftm and mtf, and we hope they have found a way to be comfortable with themselves. This said, we strongly feel that it is important to note the difference between mtfs and lesbians, whose interests are often diametrically opposed. We need to state that what we are concerned about is defending women s spaces. We must affirm that protective measures dedicated to women must not be redirected to a constituency which, while in need of policies of support, does not have the same needs as women themselves.
An idea is being promoted that what is outside the mind, including the body, totally depends on our perceived and conceptual patterns. It seems that the only thing we can be sure of is our thinking, as our senses betray us and do not allow us to distinguish between dream and reality. If dream becomes confused with reality and if the sexed body with which we are born does not fulfill our desires, it is possible to deny this body, reconstruct it, reinterpret it, manipulate it, transition it. But unexpectedly, reality resists: it sets a limit to desire, it often says no, it is never completely available to the subject s theoretical constructs. Our female body is part of those real things that are gifted with permanence, and which exist independently of our will. When we look at our body in the mirror, we might not admit it is ours, we might love it or hate it, but inevitably we are confronted with an inescapable limit. The body, with its needs, its pleasures, its unexpected illnesses, its healing, its potential, its fragility, resists the power of narratives.

3 From civil partnership to false rights

3.1 Lesbians are not the wives of gay men[7]

On May 11, 2016, the law on civil partnership come into force. Symbolically this might represent the day the lgbt movement split and our common horizon disintegrated. For many years the alliance between the various components of the rainbow coalition was based on the struggle against discrimination and for the recognition of same-sex couples. The differences we had set aside during this struggle reemerged as soon as these goals were met. Our differences then took center stage.
The majority in the movement has accelerated the pace on the path it was already on, which we might call rights-ism, and has been unable to overcome the mentality of being discriminated . The movement continues to present reality as if we were still being persecuted, counting on an automatic reflex pushing to say : there s something I don t have and therefore I am being discriminated, I must defend my right to (it)& , whatever it is that one lacks[8]. It appears that the movement has become incapable of a broader analysis of reality: it cannot see that on several issues it has been victorious. It does not realize that notwithstanding many areas of backwardness still existing in our country, the horizon has changed, due to the battles we have fought, as well as the broader changes that have occurred in our society. We should be able to look farther.
This does not mean we should stop offering support services to those who suffer discrimination, but it means understanding that the cultural battle has been won and that we need to change our focus. It seems that what is missing is the capacity and the will to articulate new political thought in upholding issues of social justice. The thrust with which we had demanded an end to being considered second class citizens, whether we were male or female, has morphed into claiming rights that now

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7. Daniela Danna'a caustic definition.
8. For example see https://lacittanews.it/2020/09/04/lo-sfogo-di-un-papa-cambio-12-pannolini-al-giorno-ma-sulle-salviette-ce-scritto-grazie-mamma/: Carlo Tumino, a man from Rimini, a "father by choice," who has two children born through surrogacy in the USA, made a public appeal to Fissan because its diaper product carries a printed message saying "thank you mom", and this belittles the father figure.

respond less and less to the needs of most lesbians and gay men. The movement seems emptied of meaningful and effective content, and this emptiness is badly disguised as a longer list of demands.
Some of the rights that are being claimed have never been openly debated among the various factions of the movement. They are not even rights: they actually contain aspects that are quite problematic from an ethical standpoint. We might call them false rights. They are personal desires that are perceived and expressed as if they were rights. These false rights aspire to be listed in the category of positive rights, a category which, for example, includes the right to health or education. Once they are sanctioned, these rights imply the existence of a body (usually a governmental one) which must provide the services necessary to make them a reality. But the personal desire to have children does not imply a public obligation to contribute to its realization if the cost is the objectification of women and children, as happens in surrogacy. Becoming parents is a possibility in human life: it should not be made a reality by coercion, nor should it be impeded by the state, yet such a possibility does not imply that women are required to provide this service with their bodies (with or without interference from the government). In the same vein, women s bodies are not meant to be made available so that all people can have access to sexual relations[9].

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9. For example, people talk about disabled people's right to sexuality, and this has led to the idea of assisted sexuality, which EPSEAS (European
Platform Sexual Assistance) defines as support for people with disabilities in the realm of sexuality. Their site offers a hypocritical warning, which states that the beneficiary does not pay for a treatment or for a specific act, but for the time spent in the company of the person providing sexual assistance. In Italy, the organization called Lovegiver Association ONLUS of Bologna, organizes classes to train sexual assistants. Their website states that what is expected of the assistant is not intercourse, that is, penetration, or oral sex; however, physical contact between nude bodies and facilitating masturbation is allowed. These limits are already hard to control, they are not the same in all countries and for all female sexual assistants. In any case, what is the norm everywhere is the monetary reward that is paid for various forms of sexual assistance. The language used is, on the one hand, the language of rights (the right of a disabled person to explore sexuality) and on the other hand, the language of empathy. The reality is, however, that sexual activity is not a right, whether for abled or for disabled people: it is only a possibility that may come from relationships between human beings. Sexual assistance is

Many people think these false rights are legitimate just because they express an intense desire, and because satisfying them is in accordance with neoliberal culture, which is capturing ever more successfully even leftwing people (for decades both men and women lgbt activists have been on the left). The marketplace tells us and has us telling ourselves that having a desire automatically means we have a right to get what we desire[10]. Fanning desire and de-objectifying reality have become imperatives of the lgbt movement. Few women or men have made their disagreement known. Within the lgbt movement, ArciLesbica has been almost the only opposing voice, and ever since that moment we have been attacked in all kinds of ways[11].
The left has disintegrated: it no longer represents a political anchor for

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the expansion of the sex industry into another market niche that has the added advantage of presenting itself as empathic. The emotion it brings up makes us forget the issue that money is being exchanged for sex.
10. In the words of Laura Bazzicalupo: "The world is full of individuals who think of themselves as "free", autonomous, who have needs, desires, interests and choices. In order to be able to act, however, they need to be trained, guided and directed by competent authorities so that they may put their freedom into practice. The imaginary world they share, extols a self-directed life and self-made choices which go far beyond what was possible in the past. We no longer live in an environment of destiny, of conditions that we had to accept because they were impossible to modify: fate no longer befalls us. Sterility, impotence, frustration, anguish, illnesses, and finally, the fatality of "natural" sex: everything can be modified, as opposed to being passively endured. And the increase in life and wellbeing, which is an obsessive imperative of our times, is no longer managed by paternalistic state power, but handed over to us as the responsibility of each individual: we are now invited to plan our own life, take our own risks and chances. However, as Nikolas Rose points out, what the individual needs, to make choices a reality, is a network of private companies such as fertility and sexuality clinics, multinational biotechnical conglomerates, and professional medical associations. These in turn are ruled by a complex system of certifications, standards, evaluation of services provided, and profit versus loss balance sheets. In addition there are the lobbies which organize the demand for specialized treatments; bioethical committees, moral and religious agencies…The post-welfare reorganization of political and state powers relegates the responsibility of our body, and of our human reproduction to a proliferation of power centers whose formal and legal standing is ambiguous, and which have no democratic legitimacy […]" Rivista di sessuologia volume 35 n.3, July/September 2011, pages 161-162.
11. See Cristina Gramolini, A messy fracture: the debate over surrogacy within the

the lgbt movement, nor does it provide cultural guidelines to help articulate our demands, so that they remain compatible with social values and maintain a healthy distrust of, and distance from, the domineering influence of the market. Political discourse and thought have caved in to the dominating influence of neoliberalism, and many people on the left, orphaned from their own organizations and political parties, have fallen prey to the fascination of queer vernacular.
The explosion of demands for false rights expresses desires that the market would be able to fulfill if certain laws were approved, such as legalization of prostitution and wombs for hire; this is the way for prostitution and surrogacy to become legal, respectable business propositions, allowing those reaping the profits thereof not to have to worry about negative legal consequences.
According to neoliberalism, contracts are the most rational way to organize human relations, and signing a contract always happens in utter freedom, of course. The market does not ask itself the difference between formal justice and real justice, nor does it ponder any ethical questions. The market does not care whether some contracts increase human suffering: all that matters is the healthy functioning of business propositions. But movements for liberation should care a great deal.
We take our stand against false rights and the market of limitless desires. We believe there is a limit. The limit is the fact that the human body and life itself cannot be turned into merchandise, to be bought or sold. We reject the exploitation that is necessary to satisfy the ever more implacable demands of the customer. And it s no accident that the site of this collision happens to be women, women s bodies. We defend the right of women to keep their bodies inviolable, unavailable for exploitation[12].

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lgbt+ movement in Italy, in Embrionic Odyssey, ed. Laura Corradi, Mimesis 2019
12. See the Italian Civil Code (article 5) for the assertion that the body is not to be made available for exploitation; the Convention of Oviedo for the protection of the Rights of Man and the dignity of the human being with regard to applications of biology and medicine: Convention of the Rights of Man and biomedicine (Chapter VII); the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union (article 3); and, last but not least, the prohibition against the selling and buying of children.

3.2 The fracture

It was the eve of the last parliamentary step before passage of the law on civil partnership. On March 5th, 2016, an lgbt demonstration takes place in Rome: it s practically sole objective is opposition to wording in the upcoming law Because there was no stepchild adoption[13] - which would provide a way for the law to include surrogacy, that is, wombs for hire, euphemistically called gpa (gravidanza per altri, pregnancy on behalf of others). Speaking from the podium in Rome, Giulia Innocenzi, the woman journalist who is the testimonial of the demonstration, first states that she is making herself available to carry a child for others (although it seems she still has not done so); then she introduces the people giving the speeches, almost all of them favorable to surrogacy.
Arcigay and Famiglie Arcobaleno (Rainbow families) know very well, from previous open confrontations, that for years ArciLesbica has been speaking out against the commercial surrogacy of maternity[14]. This doesn t seem to make any difference: they continue to beat the drum about discrimination. It should be noted that the honorary president of Arcigay, Sergio Lo Giudice, got married in Norway to Michele Giarratano, who has a child that he obtained through surrogacy in 2014 in the USA[15].
As soon as same-sex marriage is approved in May 2016, without even making time to celebrate this victory, the controversy over maternal surrogacy begins. In fact, feminist research is starting to point out that even altruistic maternal surrogacy is, in fact, a business proposition[16]. Now what? What is our position?

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13. Adoption of one's partner's child.
14. The beginning of our critique of commercial maternal surrogacy can be traced back to papers presented at the 2012 Congress http://www.arcilesbica.it/congressi-nazionali/
15. https://www.gaypost.it/sergio-lo-giudice-miei-figli-finalmente-due-papa. Giarratano he will have a second daughter using the same method of surrogacy in October 2016 and Lo Giudice will obtain stepchild adoption of both children in 2019.
16. Marina Terragni, Temporary Mother: Womb for Hire and the Marketing of Children, Vanda 2016; Luisa Muraro, The Soul of the Body, La Scuola, 2016; Daniela Danna, Having a child for others is right False! Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2017, Maternal Surrogacy? Trieste, Asterios 2017; Francesca Izzo, Maternity and Liberty, Castelvecchi 2017

3.3 Feminism is not a gay meal

The lesbians in ArciLesbica, while agreeing that they are against commercial surrogacy, start fighting among each other: some are for, others are against the campaign for the universal abolition of all forms of surrogacy, and this is the issue upon which their relationship with the lgbt movement is going to hinge. As the Bologna convention of 2017 ends, Arcilesbica is left with internal divisions. The losing groups, those who posited the regulation of maternal surrogacy, abandon the association. Shortly afterwards, many lesbians who are not members of ArciLesbica, sign a letter which comes out in the daily paper Il Manifesto, and begins: We are part of a network of lesbians who are tired. Devastated by a year and a half during which one single issue has been imposed upon us and has dominated our movement: pregnancy on behalf of others (gpa) . The letter exposes and denounces the convergence between these positions and the goals as well as the language used by the right, namely the Salvini-Meloni group that is pushing family values [&]. We are convinced that the reason our enemies on the right are afraid of pregnancy on behalf of others, is because it is a form of emancipation from a role that is imposed. And we wonder if paradoxically this fear might not be that of some feminist lesbians as well[17] . Up to now a woman who refused to take on the role of a mother simply did not have a child. The opinion quoted above implies that bearing a child for others is seen as a new way of rejecting an imposed role, which is a strange interpretation at best. Turning human reproduction into a job is thus given a feminist veneer[18].

The divisions between lesbians are closely monitored and encouraged by gay men in the movement: the organization Circolo Mario Mieli in

17. Il Manifesto, 18.5.2018

18. This stance offers support to the position of fathers in the Famiglie Arcobaleno (Rainbow Families organisation). See the statement: Position of Famiglie Arcobaleno on several ethically sensitive issues, which can no longer be found directly on the association's website, but can still be seen here: http://www.famigliearcobaleno.or/userfiles/file/Posizioni%20FA%20 su%20temi%20eticamente%20sensibili.pdf. In Article 4 they state: "In our opinion GPA constitutes a crucial experience of female consciousness raising: when this helps gay fathers or single fathers to become parents, it becomes an added tool of liberation for males and an extraordinary way to upend social performance, gender roles and the obligations that have historically been imposed on women".

Rome had already asked for the expulsion of ArciLesbica from the lgbt movement during Pride 2017[19]: this really happened the year after with the shocking eviction of Arcilesbica from the Cassero building in Bologna[20]. Sergio Lo Giudice justified this action by accusing ArciLesbica of ideological regression . This is an exemplary case, a warning to all lesbians not to forgo its alliance with gay men, on pain of being thrown out. ArciLesbica has had its headquarters in Cassero in Bologna dating back to ArciLesbica s foundation in 1996: now the city is shaken by the controversies reported in the press about the lack of diversity and pluralism in a movement which wraps itself in rainbow colors, inviting the great diversity of human beings to live together in harmony. The lgbt movement, which had no qualms a few years back about welcoming in openly rightist groups like Gaylib, now expels women when they refuse to go along. The arrogant behavior of men toward women is operative among homosexual men too, and we cannot help noticing a certain return to virility in Italian gay men who have now become respectable citizens. They have replaced the irony they were known for with a punitive stance, expressing anger at the obstacles that feminist women pose to the possibilities of existential fulfillment that white, wealthy men, used to a life full of possibilities, have so recently conquered[21].

19. 2017, https://www.facebook.com/CCOMarioMieli/photos/a.308606725832 766/1808814745811949/?type=3&theater, read on 1.11.2018 at 12.45

20. The ArciLesbica group in Bologna, which had opted for regulation and had their proposal defeatedduring the Congress mentioned above, in March 2018 broke off its affiliation with the main Association and renamed itself Lesbiche Bologna (Bologna Lesbians). On May 11th, 2018, National ArciLesbica was notified by mail that it was being evicted from Cassero in Bologna, the very place which had been its headquarters since its inception in 1996: the sender was direttivo@cassero.it and the signatories were Arcigay "Il Cassero", Associazione Lesbiche Bologna, Agedo Bologna, and Famiglie Arcobaleno of Emilia-Romagna. The text read: "We inform you that since the Bolognese branch has distanced itself from the ArciLesbica organization as a whole, it is no longer possible for you to keep your legal headquarters in the Salara di Bologna, Don Minzoni Street n. 18 […] We therefore need to inform you that it will no longer be possible for us to accept mail for you or in your name; all such correspondence will be sent back to the sender."

21. Cristina Gramolini, A messy fracture, cit.

3.4 Agedo and Famiglie Arcobaleno

The branches of Agedo and Famiglie Arcobaleno in Bologna have also approved of the expulsion of ArciLesbica from Cassero[22]. Agedo is a national association which, since its inception, has given worthwhile support to parents who discovered their children were gay or lesbian, and through the years it has worked to develop social and institutional sensitivity to the issue[23]. Agedo s main message is that same-sex couples are romantic, good people, they are respectable partners who can also be good parents, regardless of how they become parents[24]. Agedo parents hope to become grandparents, they don t believe in discriminating homosexual offspring, and they don t see anything wrong with looking at maternal surrogacy as a form of solidarity[25].

Famiglie Arcobaleno, more than any other association in the lgbt world, represents the interests of those considering maternal surrogacy: there are several gay fathers among its members who have availed themselves of surrogacy. The association normalizes the use of wombs for rent on a par with artificial insemination, as if the production of semen on the one hand, and the extraction of oocytes, plus pregnancy and giving birth, on the other, were practices of equal impact. The association s stated position on the family, by the way, affirms there is no difference between the maternal and paternal role, presenting them as parental figures that are perfectly equivalent.

This attitude reveals how the association s vision is that will is omnipotent: one is born from someone s intention, not from a mother[26].

To this day (September 2020) the homepage of the association still carries the posters of the 2016 Campaign for ShareLove, with slogans such as: Every family is sacred[27]; its response to Family Day was Family Every Day . Family-ism is the celebrated paradigm, which is also revealed in the exemplary video Little Egg[28] and in many reassuring storytellings[29]. Much emphasis is placed on love, and rightly so: yet love is invoked to justify and legitimize anything and everything.

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22. In the past, some differences of opinion had been tolerated: for example, in 2009 Agedo, together with Arcigay and Famiglie Arcobaleno, agreed to have a meeting with Gianfranco Fini, the President of the Chamber of Deputies (Camera), while ArciLesbica refused to attend, not wanting to give a semblance of progressiveness to the head of a party that had its origins in MSI, a fascist party. On another occasion, in 2015, Arcilesbica had already had already manifested its opposition: it was the only organization that did not attend Expo Milano, due to Arcilesbica's criticism of the dominant model of development. But whereas there was tolerance for not participating in state functions, which left the field open to those who actually wanted to attend, it was another matter altogether to speak out publicly against the lgbt movement's advocacy of maternal surrogacy: this was deemed intolerable. http://www.famigliearcobaleno.org/it/stampa/rassegna-stampa/63/ read at 16:45.

23. "If we therefore were able to help each parent to overcome this mindset, as we ourselves have successfully done, albeit almost always with great effort, what a benefit this would be for the whole family, especially the homosexual or transsexual daughters or sons, who would then find a more welcoming environment, enabling them to be stronger, more confident in their identity, erasing shame. […] They would no longer have to adopt a different, false identity, and so living a life in terror of being exposed, and could instead, live a life of dignity, like the rest of our children. […]" https://www.agedonazionale.org./storia-e-obiettivi/, read on March 15 2020, at 13.09

24. https://www.agedonazionale.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Sei-sem-pre-tu.pdf, pag. 61

25. De Santis, Il Nuoro (the male daughter-in-law), Robin Editions 2018. More recently, the facebook page of Agedo dedicates an increasing amount of space to trans themes and shares posts from @ Genderlens.

26. http://www.famigliearcobaleno.org/it/asspcoawoone/chi-siamo/http://www.famiglie-arcobaleno.org/_it/informazioni/gestazione-per-altri/ read on 15.3.2020, at 15.45

27. http://www.famigliearcobaleno.org/it/#sacrosantidiritti, https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2016/12/23/foto/_ogni_famiglia_e_sacra_il_natale_di_famiglie_arcobaleno-15475345/1/?ref=HRESS-5&fbclid=IwAR2dju-TORxU2tgjak6MYeK91Q3NOt%RBoO3JePRa6kTkQuYQcyJWI17wujk#1, read on March 2020, at 15.26 "Paris is sacred and so is missing a return flight. It's sacred to miss yet another flight, the same day, cancelled by the sacred word of a flight attendant: "c'est cancelle'". Annalisa and Maria Giulia's laughter in the midst of their protests is sacred, and so is the desire to know each other better. It's sacred to stay together that night and then for the rest of our lives. Breakfast while looking at the view of the Australian ocean is sacred and so is a beautiful little girl sitting at the next table looking at you, and so is the mom who asks you to do her the favor of holding the child in your arms for a while. Understanding at that very moment, together, that we want to be mothers, is sacred. Reading aloud, in bed, a book about those who have already done it, and crying together, is sacred. Giulio's birth is sacred, and his family is sacred, in a world which celebrates holidays while still denying him his "God-given, sacred rights".

28. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5-FTauHx0Q , read on 15.3.2020, at 15.55

29. http://wwww.famigliearcobaleno.org/it/storie/racconti/. When you're happy you want

Those in favor of maternal surrogacy literally use children born abroad as a shield, while planning after the birth to claim the child s pre-eminent interests when demanding transcriptions of birth records obtained abroad. It does not matter that a baby born through maternal surrogacy will be deprived of its mother s care, or that the pregnant mother will be under an iron fist of control from conception to delivery, or that fertilization with oocytes different from her own will be dangerous to her health, or that she will not be allowed to change her mind[30]; what matters is the customers desire to form a family that includes children: in the name of love, of course.

This way of framing the issue reveals an amoral family-ism, because in order to reach one s goals one is deliberately circumventing the law, as well as dismissing and diminishing, as if they were nothing but bigotry, the moral questions raised by creating an army of paid carriers and by selling and buying newborns as if they were merchandise[31]. The fact that even heterosexual people are availing themselves of wombs for rent, does not diminish the fact that the lgbt movement has chosen to implicate itself in this practice, and is presenting it as a progressive practice. For many years the homosexual liberation movement and feminism have criticized the family as an oppressive structure, as the foundation of the exploitation of women, as a prison for non-heterosexual people, as a place where both girls and boys get crushed. Then the homosexual liberation movement became the lgbt movement and the right to create a family became a goal that was not only political but personal. At Milan s 2019 Pride, a group from Pavia bearing the flags of Arcigay shouted gpa, gpa, family is freedom . One might live to regret the fulfillment of one s dreams.

3.5 More controversy about trans and prostitution

The first trans member of ArciLesbica was Deborah Lambillotte[32] who joined in 1998; since 2005 the Association is also open to mtf who have not had surgery, as a sign of the support we offer to those who change legal identity after hormone treatment even if not undergoing surgical destruc-

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to shout it out to the world! These are our stories, full of understanding, love, support and just a lot of daily reality. We don't feel different…just so immensely fortunate in our joyous normality as a family.

30. It is worth mentioning this paper: The position of the Association Famiglie Arcobaleno on several ethically sensitive issues, http://www.famigliearcobaleno.otemi%rg/userfiles/file/Posizioni%20FA%20su%20temi%20eticamente%20sensibili.pdf. Article 4 states: "Some people believe that in order to protect the breeders (or "carriers"), contracts between the intentional parents and the breeder should include the possibility for the carrier to change her mind, something which might conceivably happen after the experience of pregnancy. We refuse to accept the idea that women are incapable of making informed choices, or that they can have experiences in their bodies that are not coherent with their thoughts. We believe it is dangerous to retrieve concepts we rejected decades ago. We lesbian women and mothers who have experienced in our bodies much wanted pregnancies, affirm that pregnancy does not transform a woman into a weak being, a victim to her hormones to the point of changing her mind about an action that she wanted to take, that she understood and that she introjected. It is obvious that, as with any contract, there exists the possibility (even if it is a rare occurrence in the history of GPA) of changing one's mind, of wanting to rescind the contractual bonds. In that case we think it only fair that the courts should decide the future of the child, considering the child's best interests. We do not think that the will of the carrier should prevail automatically. If this were so, even should no controversy have arisen, once the process is complete, the carriers would always have the sense that they could have chosen to keep the baby as their own, and that they decided instead to "abandon" it to others, as if it were unclear to the lawmaker and to all the parties involved, who the actual parents of the child that is about to be born are. The decision which was made with full knowledge when the agreement was accepted, must be binding. This is reassuring for all concerned but most of all for the pregnant persons themselves, who know perfectly well, before, during and after, that the child they are carrying is not and never will be theirs. Otherwise, the responsibility for having "abandoned" one's own "daughter or son" would be crushing and impossible to bear." How far can the hypocrisy of the purchasers go, these customers who want a contract guaranteeing that the successful outcome of their investment will not be jeopardized by the woman they call a "carrier"?

31. See the case of newborns who had to stay in a hotel in Kiev because flights were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPdRx_L96C0. Women all over the world have risen up demanding an end to the merchandising of babies http://abolition-ms.org/nos-actions-fr/lettre-au-president-ukrainien-sur-la-situation-des-enfants-nes-par-gpa-et-bloques-en-ukraine/?fbclid=IwAR1urDCfO-pKAdNi-UUiSt4bhDFOKNh0cuDz68vgIXhU1SMKyD3dtnOhQjUo

32. Lambillotte died in 2016

tion of the genitals. Through the years we have had few trans members, because mtfs have naturally preferred becoming active in their own groups. However, some have associated with us, and we have often collaborated with others[33]: in 2016 Monica Romano was even a presenter at the convention *Gender is the new Black*, organized by ArciLesbica in Milan. The fact that we have gotten to know each other was not sufficient for the trans community[34] to oppose the plethora of accusations of transphobia that were hurled against us in August 2017 on social media, following the publication on Facebook of our article *I m a Woman. You re a Trans Woman. And that distinction matters*[35].

In November 2018, a group called Ombrette Rosse (Little Red Shadows) stages a protest in Bologna against a convention to which Rachel Moran[36] has been invited. She is a writer and a survivor of prostitution. The group Ombrette Rosse does not want to allow a debate where prostitution will be called paid rape: they claim it s an exercise of free choice. Here is a new and unusual development in the lgbt movement: unwelcome meetings are sabotaged and labeled fascist[37]. The group, together with Porpora Marcasciano, approach Cristina Gramolini as she leaves the meeting, telling her she s ugly, while Porpora defines her own self as fabulous[38]. It seems the term ugly , which for a feminist is a laughable accusation, is enormously degrading for the trans leader of MIT. This is not a mistake nor an inconsequential remark, given the fact that other trans women refer to this issue time and again, pointing out that we are hostile to mtfs because we are envious of their beauty[39]. Those who make this accusation are thereby revealing that they are not aware that lesbians ignore dominant beauty standards and have created a sense of beauty that is invisible to the male gaze. It is disconcerting to find the same idea expressed in their attack on our Facebook page in May 2020, which they follow up with a crazy online request for the expulsion of transphobic ArciLesbica from ARCI[40]. However, this time many feminists stand up for us and defend our position[41].

Paying for sex, as we are well aware, is part of male erotica, whether straight or gay; it is narrated in literature and in film, where occasional sex appears to be satisfactory and liberating, exalted by the exchange of money for sex. The error consists of unjustifiably extending such a response to women, assuming that women enjoy sex for pay. And it is a recurring error made by those who conflate female sexuality with male sexuality, those who understand nothing about sexual difference, even as they dance around with gender roles. The trans discourse fluctuates between the feeling that one is a victim of persecution, and the narcissism of fairy tales. It appeals to youth movements who are antagonistic and fascinated by trans subjectivity; they see trans people as oppressed and transgressive, something which gay men and lesbians apparently no lon-

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33. See the publication of Leslie Feinberg's Stone Butch Blues in 2004, edited by Il Dito e La Luna, the publishing house of Francesca Polo, who was the president of ArciLesbica for six years.

34. Except for Neviana Calzolari, who on the contrary approached us at that time and later testified that we were not transphobic.

35. https://www.facebook.com/ArciLesbica/posts/lei-dice-i-am-angry/1289179027857229 / read on June 6 2020, at 13.08; the link is disactivated but one can read the article here: http://www.orangepower.com/threads/i-am-a-woman-you-are-a-trans-woman-and-that-distinction-matters.233456/ read on June 11 2020 at 21.59: translated in Italian by Alessandra Guizza Lanivi on the www.arcilesbica.it site.

36. Bologna, November 19, 2018. Meeting to discuss Rachel Moran's book, Paid Rape, Round Robin 2017.

37. How this practice evolves will be visible at a later date, when a punitive gathering will be called in Milan to prevent Sheila Jeffreys' conference, scheduled for March 1st, 2020, from taking place. The conference was cancelled anyway due to the Covid emergency. The saboteurs call people to action using these words: "It is not an accident that representatives of transphobic feminism are on the same side as fascists and religious fundamentalists, even going so far as to collaborate with them in more or less obvious ways […] We do not want to let them just be. That's why we will be there, to spoil the party for those who would like to ruin our lives." https://roundrobin.info/events/milano-terfs-no-grazie/ read on 16.3.2020 at 18.23. Transfeminism is good for everybody and this way of thinking antagonistic movements (antifa) want to take over the lgbt movement.

38. Here is the scene https://youtube/tRqlH2NwPHA

39. M. Romano's post https://www.facebook.com/monica.romano/posts/2324526761134941

40. https:www.petizioni.com/arcilesbica_non_rispetta_lo_statuto_arci_chiediamo_alla_federazione_arci_di_intervenire read on 6.6.20 at 13.13)

41. https://www.facebook.com/Arcilebica/photos/a.173992542709222/2774015756040208/?type=3&theater read on 6.6.20 at 13.28

ger are. Traditionally, antagonism always meant being antiestablishment: now it seems that the lived experience of trans subjects or of sex-workers fulfills that requirement. Transfeminism does not mean feminism of trans people exclusively, it includes all those who consider themselves outside gender and sexual stereotypes. This concept allows the antagonistic movement, which is mainly heterosexual, to declare itself transfeminist inclusive of all pronouns , without having to deal with the typical anxieties gay men and lesbians evoke in heterosexuals. In exchange for allowing a broad use of the trans prefix, trans people receive unheard-of visibility. Transfeminism broadly adopts intersectionality, which it interprets mostly as a mere sum of discriminations (in the workplace, by ethnicity): in so doing it draws closer to movements usually committed to issues of class rather than sex, turning feminism into just one element of a project of change that is global and neutral.

3.6 Critique of fabulousness

In her writings Porpora Marcasciano uses the term fabulous as a miraculous, transformative word: it has been taken on enthusiastically by transfeminism, which idolizes it. What does fabulous mean? Something that comes from fables, from fairy tales, something magical and beyond reality. The fabulous ones were the movie stars, those voluptuous women wearing clinging, sequined dresses, who could capture the male gaze and dissolve male power by the impact of their female beauty and seductiveness. In the film *Gentlemen prefer blondes*, Marilyn Monroe portrays a fabulous woman, a lady powerful enough to make men run after her: she captures them and holds them in her grip (and the diva admires herself, aroused by her own self on the stage). Perhaps mtf people would like to live like fabulous females in a magic world where fantasy has not been banned: they would like to re-enact the incomparable spectacle of the diva who, because she is admired, by that same token is receiving reparations from a past full of sexist humiliations from men. This is how Marcasciano explains the term fabulousness:

> *not just the glitter, the imaginative talent in the LGBTQIA+ and particularly the trans world, but the will to not conform, to not neutralize oneself. We do not want to be normal; we don t want to fit into the fixed categories of a world that has always obliterated the trans dimension, unable to understand it; so instead, let s counter normality with plurality. This term was used in a quip from the film Stonewall , where Sylvia Rivera says: I live in another dimension, halfway between masculinity and femininity. And what might that be? The answer is: Fabulousness*[42]

This combative fabulousness, in books and out in the world, is inspired by the desire to live, to have pleasure, fueled by the need to manifest one s rage and determination in a creative way. It wants to convey the uniqueness of the trans movement[43]. Marcasciano says she fights joyously: that is her fabulousness.

The euphoria and the provocative staging are meant to convey a proud response from the gay male to the heterosexual male, who, when his desire is aroused, finds himself being challenged by the question: now that you desire me, how can you keep on humiliating me? That was a clever move. But it does not constitute our liberation: have the women who transitioned to become men (ftm), become fabulous? Have the feminists who refused the obligation to be seductive, become fabulous? And the lesbians, are they fabulous? Not at all. When the divas were performing they were availing themselves of the only power a woman had in pre-feminist times. In those times the diva was the only undefeated woman, the one who refused to be relegated to the role of a wife.

But today we do not want to carve out our space by pleasing the bosses: in fact, what we lesbians are interested in, is removing their gaze from our person. Mtf people are occupying a space that women had already vacated. The fabulous style is a man s sexual rebellion, not a woman s: it s an option for male liberation.

In recent times our Facebook pages are full of uninhibited, increasing verbal violence coming from those who criticize our ideas. Many mtf people, wanting us to confirm that they are indeed women, go so far as to

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42. https://piazzadelcampus.it/porpora-marcasciano-e-le-altre-favolose-trans-cattive-7904/

43. http://www.stampagiovanile.it/diritti-umani/il-favoloso-orgoglio-altro-di-porpora-marcasciano/

declare themselves lesbians, demanding not to be rejected as sexual partners: these are the so-called trans lesbians with a female penis . They have followers among a throng of transfeminists of all pronouns, young gay men who just want to sow their oats, and of course women who see themselves as modern women and don t want to be left out. Are they fabulous too? We do not understand why we non-conforming women should adopt the term fabulous, which only makes sense as the experience of the other person, not of oneself. We asked the group Non Una Di Meno (Nudm) from Milan these questions and got no answer: is it our inability to find an adequate term for our search for freedom? is it solidarity with the oppressed? is it envy of other people s accomplishments? is it self-hatred? We discover that these areas of conflict exist in other Western countries beside ours (i.e. the experiences of Martina Navratilova, Sylviane Agacinski, Julie Bindel, J.K. Rowling and Sheila Jeffreys[44]). Not all women are willing to pursue fabulousness: in fact, a radfem movement has begun in Italy too, starting on the web and later, meeting in person. In Rome, Milan, and Naples[45], we have held gatherings attended by historical feminists, women defending their difference from men, young women tired of queer theory, socialist women and many others whose feminism is more vague, all of them wanting to stand up for the freedom of women to initiate political action. We feel a sense of disorientation and even disbelief when we must write that women, meaning adult human females, are the subject of feminism, but so be it: nowadays this is no longer a given.

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44. https://uncommongroundmedia.com/a-meaningful-transition-julia-long/_http://www.londraitalia.com/schola/liberta-parola-scontro-dibattito-college-inglesi-20180425/ https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/ oct/09/np-platform-universities-julie-bindel-exclusion-anti-feminist-crusade https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/if-you-dont-like-no-platforming-maybe-its-you-whos-the-special-snowflake-a6884026.html https://www.ilfoglio.it/bioetica-e-diritti/2019/10/25/news/le-femministe-cacciano-dall-universita-la-star-del-femminismo-agacinski-282981 https://27esimaora.corriere.it/20_giugno_14/sesso-reale-rowling-socialiste-spagnole-battaglia-l-abolizione-dell-identita-genere-8d66c6ba-ad87-11ea-84a7-c6d5b5b928b0.shtml

45. National feminist assemblies self-convened in Rome, at the International Women's House, Carla Lonzi Hall, on December 1st 2018; in Milan, at the Fabbrica del Vapore, on May 18-19th, 2019; in Naples, at the Women's House, on February 1st, 2020.

3.7 Some don t want to be left out

The organization Non Una di Meno (Nudm) is silent about the controversy on wombs for rent. The purpose of not saying anything is probably to avoid internal divisions. Whoever has hegemony in Nudm is intending, through transfeminism, to build a potential synthesis between all the forms of anti-capitalism, which is an interesting project. But the women who are active in this organization underestimate the fact that the anal struggle against capitalism has a male signature. Indeed, the leaders of their movement have opened the door to heterosexual and gay men; word endings referring to gender have been abolished in favor of the neutral ending u; heterosexual women call themselves transfeminists-u even though there is nothing trans about them; some of these women study and teach in the university, where they write that sex work is work. To love the oppressed is admirable, but when this causes women to forget their own sex, the result is that they are simply giving in and agreeing to offer their contribution, as women, to the main ideology, which is still subversiveness. Rebellious young women have a desire for new thinking and radicalism, and they have a libertarian attitude towards all lifestyles: however, as long as they feel embarrassed about their difference, about being female, they are simply participating in the sexual revolt of males.

Transfeminism raises the trans prefix to become the umbrella that covers all forms of moving away from oppressive gender norms. In the third edition of our ArciLesbica Summer School[46], Olivia Fiorilli explained that the term feminist evokes the term woman and suggests heterosexuality, so that it is not useful for those who differ from the female gender and who feel more appropriately described by the term transfeminist. Many people describe themselves nowadays as transfeminist , especially those in the Nudm movement, because by referring to the trans experience they are also expressing solidarity with people who do not fit into established parameters: the goal is to express a revolt against current morality. It is for these same reasons that Nudm defends

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46. The disappearance of lesbians. The premature dissolution of the female subject, 2016 http://www.arcilesbica.it/eventi/scuola-estiva-di-studi-sul-lesbismo-e-sul-genere-2016/

so-called sex work yet does not take into account that while the conformist will publicly reject mtf people and prostitution, he will discreetly avail himself of them: so there goes your subversiveness. Trans people s experience includes much more than diverging from gender norms: they declare that they have always felt different from the sex they were born with, and so took action to modify their sex, an attempt that was dangerous and often had irreversible consequences. It is strange that given the heavy load of extreme psychological and bodily experiences they have gone through (including medicalization, changing their birth record, restructuring their social relationships due to a new identity, searching for a partner who will accept their transition), they allow transness to be adopted so effortlessly by anyone who feels they re against sexism. Their only compensation is that the term trans, which until recently described an ultra-minority, has now become a household word, even if not universally accepted[47].

3.8 But what were we like before?

For numerous years, we lgbt women and men were considered deviant people. Though we were not the first generation of activists, in the 1990s many of us women continued to have problems of visibility; we experienced fear in our relationships and in our sexuality; we had very few novels to read that represented us; we had almost no voice in official culture or in the political arena. Even in revolutionary circles we were ignored, the focus being on the international class struggle and world revolution.

Because of our common and hardly tolerated marginality, we lesbians, gay men and trans people, built bridges of collaboration, sometimes of friendship. We encouraged each other to move forward, beyond our own group: we listened to each other with curiosity about our different worlds, made ourselves available to help lgbt people when they were in trouble, the same trouble we women had once experienced. Naturally we had

47. In English-speaking countries the clash between transsexuals and transactivists begins to emerge here, for example: https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=C1roM98Dass, and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDT-Yj5n6zE)

our own origin myths, a few precious things we guarded with special care, which protected our vulnerable but combative identities. This is how we changed our lives and even changed society s way of thinking. Yet it was never a romance[48]. The lgbt community was stratified by sex, by political preferences and by financial resources, and it included small intellectual elites we both loved and hated. In the meantime, as liberalism has triumphed in the public sphere, the jargon of business has infiltrated our gatherings, while sponsors have invaded our marches, which Arcigay, the leading association, has always organized.

Life moved on and mother wept because of us: there was the risk of mobbing, the fear that the landlord might identify us as the lesbians pictured in the newspaper, since we were always throwing ourselves into anything that might make people more aware. Starting in 1996 those of us who were members of ArciLesbica also worked hard to make space for lesbian culture (organizing Summer Schools, seminars, conventions, exhibitions), making sure that our experiences spoke not only of discrimination but also, and even more so, of freedom for women. We were angry with feminism because it concerned itself with all women except us: the focus was on witches, mystics, partisans, courtesans, poets, heretics, writers, workers, philosophers, but love between women was never mentioned, even though in some cases those women were lesbians, just like the women scholars who were writing about them!

Feminism also dealt with women s right to work (what about the harassment we experienced at our jobs?), opposition to violence (what about the violence we were subjected to?), the issue of abortion (what about our sexuality?). It s still hard to believe, but that s how it really was. This situation motivated us to become scholars, speakers, union women, even though the effort took us to the limit of our capabilities. And it propelled us toward the gay movement, which while it was male and foreign to us, nevertheless had two beautiful qualities: it was a spiral of coming

48. It is useful to remember that the lesbian movement first started in separatist groups (women only and/or lesbian only): even if a few lesbians found the gay movement before the lesbian movement, the political roots of the lesbian movement were and are separate from gay groups. ArciLesbica, which for years has been a strong ally of Arcigay and other mixed associations, has always insisted on its clearly stated choice to be a female association.

out and a environment of social activism where we didn t have to fear male sexual advances. All lesbians feel the sense of otherness when we get together with gay men: however, we chose to overlook this because we thought that in the end the benefits would outweigh the costs. And then we won: we got a law allowing civil partnership, and to top it off we got accepted by the opinion makers. Yet we were unprepared for victory. As we were about to enter our society as equals, we were still full of anti-discrimination rhetoric, nor had we correctly weighed our political and ethical differences. In ArciLesbica we were used to actively practicing horizontal alliances: since 2001 we had participated in social forums, to contribute to the definition of an alternative model of society and of development [&] giving a voice to lesbian difference in the movement of movements, making sure that sexist concepts and actions would not make a comeback in this possible new world[49]. We were still doing this until 2019, the year we worked together to set up the Milano Exhibition and 50 years of the lgbt movement. In spite of our efforts, during these last years we have experienced our allies violent reaction the minute we defend our sexual difference, and this continues to this day. In such a situation friendship is no longer possible.

49. Thesis of the Third Conference 2002 http://www.arcilesbica.it/wp-conternt/uploads/2015/12/tesi-congresso-arcilesbica-2002.pdf

4 Transfeminism and why lesbians should reject it

4.1 Individualism and agency

Transfeminism is not an updated version of feminism, or a feminism beyond feminism, nor a transnational feminism. It is a theoretical construct that has as its center queer[50] theories on gender. It represents the point of view of sexual minorities, with special consideration for the experience of mtfs.

The theoretical body of queer and transfeminism is unitarity nor organic[51]. Here we will discuss the positions on sex, gender and agency that occur most often in those theories. Queer theories are favorite subjects of discussion mainly in university Departments of Gender Studies[52] where feminism has been banned and no longer has the right to speak[53]. These

50. Originally the term queer simply meant something strange (strictly speaking it means oblique, slanting). In the 1800s it morphs into an insult to homosexuals, as opposed to upright, straight, which to this day indicates heterosexuals. Lgbt activists only start using it at the end of the 1900s: the first woman to give it its present meaning is Teresa de Lauretis, who in 1991 was the editor of a special issue of the feminist magazine Differences: A journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, with the title Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities.

51. To put it simply: queer theories maintain that reality is a construction of the discourse of power. Using as a basis Foucault's concept of the microphysics of power, not only do they study the institutional sphere of Power (capitalized), which dominates us and which we try to escape by attempting to open up new spaces of freedom; they also study the power that is at work in the production of social relations and of subjectivity. The risk of radical constructivism is that it portrays reality as the product of our mental constructs, our interpretations and our narratives.

52. Women's Studies has morphed into Gender Studies, therefore allowing all males in academia to come in.

53. Not only is our university career threatened if we distance ourselves from queer beliefs, it is often not possible to offer differing positions in academic debate, usually because transactivists who oppose them by de-platforming. De-platforming or no-platforming is being used more and more frequently: this consists in preventing people from speaking in public places, in university or at conferences. Transgender activists consider it a real form of political activism which is justified by declaring that some people are fascists, feminazis and exclusionary. It is the activists themselves, obviously, who decide who they will label this way. It is a practice that limits the possibility of critical de

theories have recently passed from academia into the sphere of activism, especially social media activism, providing trans activists with foggy slogans and analysis, creating contradictory positions which are sometimes complicit with the neoliberal system they are supposedly opposing[54]. Neoliberalism disintegrates class bonds and dissolves social bonds. Neoliberalism wants us to be women who are free to choose among market options, but who are incapable of having relationships based on caring and closeness with other people and with the world. The desires of the individual are channeled into the choices available in the marketplace, and the fact that the female consumer can choose is used as proof of her freedom. We are free to sign any kind of contract, not only those that exploit our labor, but those that put our bodies on the market as well. We are entrepreneurs of ourselves: each one of us sells what she has and buys what she can. Services essential to life, which were once provided by the social state, have now been reduced, which means that if we are not wealthy, we can sell or rent out our bodies if need be. In these times of late capitalism, the new frontier for fresh profits is the human body, its organs, its functions[55].
Transfeminism says that if a woman as a consumer can make a choice, this means she has agency. Yet there is a refusal to analyze the array of forces impinging upon her choice. We are dealing here with extreme formalism: if an action is not taken under overt physical threat, it is considered freely chosen. In the past the left has always tried to read reality in terms of structure and of collective interests, but this compass no longer seems to be working. Therefore, choices that are difficult or

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bate. This is how these activists try to control which opinions get to be heard throughout the world. In Chapter 3 we give examples of these aggressive practices in Italy.
54. These theories have problematic consequences in the political arena. One does not measure the validity of a theory exclusively on the basis of its practical and political effects; however, since this theory purports to be a tool of liberation, this kind of valuing makes sense. Transfeminism takes us further away from the freedom that we want for all women, as we explain in this chapter,
55. Marie-Jo Bonnet, Goodbye Rebellious Women, Flammarion 2014; Desire and Freedom, Issues of feminist and lesbian politics, edited by M. Giacobino, Il Dito e la Luna 2018

even excruciating to make (the most egregious being prostitution, but also choosing to emigrate, accepting underpaid jobs or renting out one s womb in surrogacy) are presented as free choices, and the women who make them are seen as emancipated, all the more so if these choices were traditionally unseemly , therefore considered transgressive by transfeminists. But what can be less novel or subversive than a prostituted woman, than a man who buys the right to rape her? Yes, an unwanted sexual act is a rape even if done in exchange for money. Transactivists see prostitution through men s eyes, extending to women the possibility of pleasure that the exchange of sex for money produces in males, not noticing the abysmal difference with female prostitution. Criticizing violence against women and their exploitation does not mean reducing women to passive victims. Every woman seeks and has always sought to improve her situation, to expand her freedom. While we pay attention to the forms of even minimal resistance that women have attempted, we still need to oppose the system of exploitation in which they are immersed. And condemning the system that causes prostitution does not equate stigmatizing the women in it. The standard comeback to the objections of abolitionists who oppose prostitution and surrogacy, is that in the capitalist system everyone prostitutes themselves as they can, so who are you to decide about another woman s body? This objection is a perfect reflection of the liberalism that rules nowadays. These are ways of thinking that prevent the possibility of political debate or of identifying power relations: when adopted by self-styled anticapitalists they are shocking. If we assume the point of view of individual choice, we go off the rails, we omit the numbers of the phenomenon, when the fact is that the greater number of prostituted women are victims of the sex trade, while we focus instead on a small minority who might be freely choosing to put themselves on the market. This is how reality gets twisted, and everything is interpreted in light of the sexist saying, *the oldest job in the world* (updated to *sex work*), glossing over the circumstances that cause women to submit to the system of prostitution, while silencing any criticism of pimps, johns and exploiters.
In the same vein the slogan *my womb is mine and I decide how to use it*, is given new meaning in today s marketplace, forgetting what it really meant originally certainly feminists never advocated for a woman to

put her uterus on the market[56]. The critical spirit of the left often seems to dissolve when the issue is women s bodies: the left approves the sale and rental of parts of a woman s body and calls this agency.
This is how everything becomes private and the political vanishes. Exactly the opposite of what feminism discovered and proposed: that the personal is political[57]. Feminism does not exclude any personal choices or lifestyles from critical analysis. When transfeminist women say that personal choices cannot be subject to judgment, they create opaque environments where political judgment cannot interfere, because no woman

56. From the document Position of Famiglie Arcobaleno on some ethically sensitive issueshttp://www.famigliarcobaleno.org/userfiles/file/ Posizioni%20FA%20su%20temi%20eticamente%20sensibili.pdf
Article 4 talks about the exchange of money for surrogacy: “We believe that monetary compensation is necessary and desirable and should be given in the framework of a transparent and legal system, that is, protected by state laws, in the interest of the woman herself. We believe such compensation should be balanced and proportional to the psychological investment of the pregnant woman. Bearing a child in her body entails not only nine months of pregnancy but an additional three months of physical recovery. In other words, it means devoting a full year to this project, which includes medical visits, constant attention to diet and physical activity, money spent on adequate clothing, traveling to clinics for check-ups, missing work more often or stopping work altogether, taking on the risk of health problems, etc.…In our estimation she therefore deserves adequate compensation, which nevertheless will never repay the debt owed her for her generosity, for doing something so important. Baby bearers in America and in Canada receive compensation in the amount of 19,000 euros (about $ 21,000) which we think is an adequate sum and not one that would encourage women who are in a good economic position to choose GPA as their only job. Baby bearers are people cognizant of making this choice for any number of reasons, often for altruistic motives; however, without adequate compensation they would probably not choose to do this. This means that these women are well aware of their power, and they are able to understand that an investment of this caliber deserves monetary compensation.”
57. The practice of feminism means starting with our individual stories; comparing them allows us to develop theories which are critical of what exists (specifically the relationship between the sexes) both in the private as well as the political sphere. Such theories are strong because they are rooted in the lived experience of each one of us, having particularities and above all, unexpected similarities. They are not ideologies detached from reality; they are theories that function as essential tools for interpreting reality, as the foundation of a political struggle for change. This method used to be called consciousness-raising and can be identified nowadays as “starting from oneself”.

is in a position to say what is right or what is wrong[58]. This means one refuses to have a discussion with others about people s choices: people go back to being private and isolated entities. Interpreting society in terms of individual choices and formal freedom and using a legal and contractual lens, prevents us from being able to articulate critical judgments of a political nature, notwithstanding any cultural genealogies and deconstructionist techniques that one has learned to apply.

4.2 Intersectionality

Transfeminism revels in defining itself intersectional. It s true that intersectionality is a useful point of view in analyzing reality, however, this is not something new that transfeminism has brought us. Intersectionality was and is part of feminism. This term was first used in 1989 by Kimberle Crenshaw, a black lawyer and activist from the United States[59], as a legal concept that describes the particular position of black women, who are discriminated against not just because they are women, or just because

58. Here are some examples of transfeminist arguments: “[…] intersectional feminism is non dogmatic by definition, since every action has a profoundly different meaning according to the context in which it takes place […] For example let’s take hair removal: for a cis-gendered woman the refusal to remove body hair might mean rebelling against the idea that body hair is acceptable only in males, while for a transgender woman it is a way of living her identity authentically […] For the victim of the sex trade, prostitution represents an immense violence, whereas for a sex worker it can mean a way to achieve economic independence, as dignified a way as any other to make a living.” See Intersectional feminism, or why this struggle is relevant to you too, by Adriana and Alice, from the Feminist Collective Grrramigna, November 28 2017 https://nonunadimeno.wordpress.com/2017/11/28/femminismo-intersezionale-o-perche-questa-lotta-e-anche-tua-intersezioni-2/ Women should not be accused of strengthening gender stereotypes when making their choices, even if these choices seem to follow gender roles; such an expectation of purity demeans women, because it denies us our free will […] Transfeminism believes that there are as many ways to be a woman as there are women, that we should be free to make our decisions without feeling guilty […] It is not necessary, - on the contrary, it is oppressive - to demand that women give up their freedom to make personal choices if they want to be considered true feminists […] “ see Transfeminist Manifesto by Emy Koyama, 2001 https://lesbitches.wordpress.com/2018/17/13/manifesto-transfeminista/)
59. https://www.law.columbia.edu/faculty/kimberle-crenshaw)

they are black, but specifically because they are black women (that is, subjects at the intersection of multiple social contradictions). In more general terms, intersectionality points out how racialization, class and sex and other social features interweave and construct a complexity of discrimination. This does not mean that all of us, women and men, have our own cross to bear and therefore can be part of the same movement. A movement which everyone can feel a part of by considering oneself an intersectional subject and piling up specific personal issues, loses meaning altogether and ends up becoming ineffective. Intersectionality does not mean a hierarchy of oppressions (a competition to see who has more of them), neither is it the sum of each woman s difficulties: intersectionality focuses on complex identities which are shaped by the crossing of different oppressions. It s a structural analysis: it is not a synonym for inclusiveness and tolerance. The fact remains that lesbians are born as an intersectional subject. Since we are both women and homosexuals, we are in a better position to understand this concept than are female or male academics who flaunt intersectionality everywhere.

Even before Crenshaw, the intersectional approach was present in second wave feminism, though under a different name. Remember the black lesbians in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981)[60], as well as the writings of Audre Lorde[61], Cherrie Moraga[62] and Gloria Anzaldua[63], to mention a few. It s obvious that for some time now feminism has been stating that relationships between women and men based on exploitation are a conflict which needs to be articulated and connected to class and race contradictions.

60. https://otherbooksla.com/products/this-bridge-called-my-back-writings-by-radical-women-of-color-by-cherrie-moraga-and-gloria-anzaldua
61. Zami, a new writing of my name, in Italian the title is: Zami. Cosi riscrivo il mio nome, ed ETS, 2014, and Sister Outsider: Political writings by Audre Lorde, in Italian: Sorella outsider: Scritti Politici di Audre Lorde, ed by Il Dito e La Luna 2014
62. https://cherriemoraga.com/index.php/about-cherrie-moraga-1
63. https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/167856/Anzaldua,%20Gloria.pdf?sequence=1

4.3 Transfeminism for all

The reason queer theory has spread so rapidly is because it conforms to the spirit of the times, in that it focuses attention on liquid subjectivities based on performance and individual choice. In addition, many women find it easier to adopt the term queer, instead of lesbian, first of all because queer is not an Italian word, so it s less charged emotionally, and secondly because it seems inclusive. What is actually happening is that the lesbians are being erased. While the neutral term seems to welcome women in, in fact it subsumes them under the masculine, which continues to be the only universal . Those who realize this and oppose transfeminism are labeled terf[64] and swerf[65], in addition to being subjected to deplatforming. The language transfeminists use against women, feminists and lesbians is violent, and does not hold back from using threats[66]. As transfeminists have become defenders of the last in society they identify as trans people and prostitutes, they have cleared away the inhibitions opposing misogyny, calling women who do not share their views, cis (chapter 4.5) and bourgeois. In November 2016, at the demonstration against violence against women organized by DIRE[67] in Rome, male and female transfeminists superseded the notion of male violence, calling it instead gender violence (as in slogans such as against gender violence, against the violence of gender). All of a sudden the horizon has changed: our attention is now diverted as we look at how gender is violent towards everybody, instead of seeing the violence perpetrated by men against women. However, it s not just the narrative that has changed. Transfeminist groups, specifically men defining themselves as transfeminists and/or

64. Terf is the acronym for trans exclusionary radical feminist, a radical feminist who excludes trans people
65. Swerf is the acronym for sex worker exclusionary radical feminist, a radical feminist who excludes sex workers
66. Now even those men who identify as leftwing have found a good excuse to try to threaten women and make them shut up, without feeling guilty: this is what we have gained from the transactivists' positions! Just take a look at the facebook pages of ArciLesbica from May 24th to May 30th, 2020 to see a sample of their insults and threats.
67. DIRE: Donne in Rete contro la violenza, Women Online against Violence, women who run shelters for women escaping male violence.

queer on social media, demanded to walk at the head of that demonstration alongside the women of DIRE, and they violently attacked the women who opposed their demand. We are well aware of the violence of gender norms, but it is not admissible to use this as an excuse to hide the overwhelming reality of male violence against women. Transfeminism is therefore a form of feminism for everybody, an excuse for a mixed group of men and women to invade demonstrations of women s political action, to the detriment of women. Homosexual women who call themselves queer believe that the identifying trait of their subjectivity is their non-heterosexual orientation, which causes them to suffer discrimination: therefore, they feel their first affiliation is with gay men. They see transgression of the heterosexual norm as the main road to liberation.

Many young women attracted to women come to believe they are ftm through social media; so to fit in, they willingly undergo, at an ever earlier age, a hormonal and surgical assault that we might appropriately call conversion therapy to heterosexuality (forgetting that the sex we are born with cannot be changed). There are increasing numbers of women who regret taking this path[68].

Lesbians, on the contrary, believe that the fundamental element of our social condition is the fact that we are women: we have accepted this as we have become aware of our preference for other women. This allows us to forge an alliance with gay men; however, we do not identify as belonging to the same group. Our primary identification with all women (regardless of sexual orientation) means we see the struggle against male domination, and the struggle for women s freedom, as the primary path to liberation.

We lesbians believe that the transfeminist vision is a trap for women, because it does not name the primary oppression, which is sexual oppression; because it carries us into the realm of neutrality (where we keep finding the male); and because it imposes on us transgressions which we are not interested in.

68. https://www.bbc.com/news/health-51676020
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hRFvAg54hg not just young people
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDi-jFVBLA8 https://www.bbc.com/news/av/health-51193849/i-used-gender- transition-as-a-form-of-escape
https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/puberty-blockers-for-children?fbclid=IwAR04d8nGcoZeRJHhYCIyWQJfj_CS2p3x4WyLan3Wb-GfLEJCxH60KjatPLyY, translated in Italian on October 9, 2020 on
https:/www.facebook.com/radfem.italia/post/1278521902512029

4.4 The gender contradiction

What is sex, what is gender[69]? Sex indicates the identifying biological and reproductive traits a person is born with. We are therefore dealing with a natural fact, even though nature is always seen from, and assigned meaning to, a particular historical and cultural point of view. From the very start, sex is seen from the point of view of gender (which provides the language we use to make sense of and give meaning to our natural sexual traits) but sex does retain its independence from thought. The body has its own reality which thought can give significance to, but cannot change[70] (for example: menopause happens beyond any cultural significance we may assign to it; having heterosexual sex during ovulation may result in pregnancy, which occurs beyond one s volition or desire, whether the sexual act is wanted or not, whether it was considered a homosexual

69. The term gender derives from the Latin word genus (which indicated grammatical gender, but also meant origin, family, lineage) and for hundreds of years it has simply designated a grammatical category (masculine and feminine). One of the first to make a distinction between sex and gender was the sexologist John Money in the 1950s. but the idea of a differentiation between gender norms and sex was present in the texts of feminists and female scholars years before. Then, thanks mainly to feminist critique, gender starts to mean a normative social construct. The word has been given this meaning when used by most of the international entities and conventions (for example the World Health Organization and the Istanbul Convention). The difference between sex and gender has been studied and articulated in depth by feminism, and this is one of feminism's important achievements. This work allows us to distinguish the biological fact (sex) from the social construct (gender), refuting the idea that gender is natural and unchangeable. Feminist thought has emphasized that gender norms are socially constructed, and by that same token can therefore be dismantled by political and cultural struggle. Instead, queer theory does not admit that sex exists beyond gender.)

70. We maintain a holistic vision of mind and body and the interactions between these components of ours. In reality, body and mind are one: it is our culture which has separated them and therefore sees one influencing the other, whereas they function as one entity.

act, and so forth and so on). Our human species has two sexes[71], there is no continuum (even if undoubtedly there are intersex people[72] and some sexual characteristics may have greater or lesser emphasis). Sylviane Agacinski in The Disembodied Man[73], states that the duality of the sexes is implied not only in the concept of heterosexuality and binary sexuality, but of intersexuality as well. Agacinski reaffirms the reality of sex, without which gender identity would depart from the principle of reality, were it reduced to a representation of itself, to a subjective feeling . Also genders are two. Within any particular culture, they represent the totality of prescribed norms, behaviors and outward appearance, that women and men are supposed to accept. They are the cultural superstructure of the oppression of one sexual class over another. Although gender norms vary from culture to culture and change in the course of time, they maintain their normative character: they are imposed and violent norms which crush women and keep them in their place . Gender norms try to naturalize oppression. That is why feminists oppose genders and do not believe they are natural, immutable, etched into our souls and minds. Ever since the times of Simone de Beauvoir[74] if not earlier, it was clear that genders were a cultural superstructure. Feminists have always fought to eliminate them completely, together with the material oppression of men against women. The two genders represent the norms that women and men are obliged to adhere to in order to guarantee male domination. However, every man and especially every woman, searches for his/her own way of expressing gender, which is one s personal interpretation of the general norms, in a pitched battle with the obligations that genders im-

71. One possible etymology of the word sex is from the Latin verb secare, to cut. In this sens sex “cuts” the human race in two parts, female and male.
72. People whose sexual chromosomes, genital organs and/or secondary sexual characteristics are not exclusively female or male. The fact that intersex people possess both female and male characteristics does not mean that these constitute a third or fourth sex – those characteristics still are female or male, even if in a different combination from the norm.
73. Sylviane Agacinski, The disembodied man, from the carnal body to the manufactured body, Neri Pozza 2020.
74. De Beauvoir is credited with this concept: one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman; but careful here, she is talking about women as a social category, not about females or males: we are born just females or males, it’s that simple.

pose. This is how we can say that there are as many ways of expressing gender as there are human beings. Gender expression is not innate, it is a combination of rebellion against and acceptance of social norms: one s personal way of expressing gender reveals adherence to dominant models or, conversely, the effort to distance oneself from these norms. In societies and eras where women have been most oppressed, the norms have been more rigid, leaving almost no room to maneuver, requiring a rigorous, total acceptance of them. Where women have fought for their liberation and emancipation, there is a noticeable unraveling of the fabric of the normative system of genders, and consequently greater freedom in expressions of gender. This is obviously a good thing: as feminists we fight for the destruction of gender. Those who define themselves gender fluid bring together fragments from both genders in a non-traditional way. However, the fluidity of one s gender expression presupposes those two genders, as poles between which one can place oneself, or instead, as models from which one distances oneself. The struggle of women to achieve a gender expression that rejects subordination, is important: it cannot be limited to performances that consist exclusively of clothes and makeup. It implies behaviors and choices of broader scope (gaining the ability to move autonomously in the world, being centered in oneself as opposed to being immobilized by the male gaze, aspiring to occupy workplaces and enter areas of knowledge heretofore closed to women&).
Queer analysis speaks instead of sex and gender as if they were one concept, where sex is created by gender, because without the concept of gender we would be unable to conceive of sex. This is how sex is dematerialized to the point of becoming irrelevant. There are some queer analysis we can agree with, which contradict other positions found within the same group of alliances: this analysis recognizes that gender is a disciplinary tool to keep women subordinate, that crushes women and men by requiring stereotypical behavior from both. The first gender norm is compulsory heterosexuality. Gender seeps into our lives as if through our capillaries, we internalize it, and it structures our existence as women and men in a rigid and conformist way.
We are interested in how queer analysis identifies the way gender, performance and the interiorization of domination operate. However, we are perplexed by the ensuing call to political action, when we see that queer analysis also accepts a contradictory definition of gender, as stated in the

Yogyakarta Principles[75] :

> *we understand gender identity to refer to each person s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.*

So here is a semantic slipping of the term gender: at the outset it is the sum of norms that are structured to reinforce the hierarchy of the sexes under patriarchy, a prescribed tool with a strong political function of control. But then it morphs into a personal identity, into a profound sense of self. At this point there would no longer be two genders but there could potentially be an infinite number of them, because they represent individual interpretations of femininity and masculinity[76].

4.5 Transubstantiation

Transfeminism takes its name from the prefix trans, meaning beyond/on

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75. "TheYogyakarta Principles" is a document that came out of a 2007 convention (the document was updated 10 years later) to defend the rights of homosexual and transexual people. From a feminist point of view it is possible to agree with the defense of homosexual people, but as far as transsexual people are concerned, the stated gender definition is unacceptable.

76. Transgender positions are contradictory. In some cases, it is said that gender does not exist or that it should not exist or that there are dozens if not hundreds of genders and that every man or woman can choose whichever fits her/him best. It sounds like a statement of liberation from gender stereotypes. But it is also said that if a boy likes dolls and lipstick, he must be a girl: in this case gender exists and it is a tyrant. It cannot be taken lightly, it must be wholly accepted and the boy's sex needs to be changed immediately, since the "assigned" sex at birth is wrong. In this version of transgender thought, gender is innate and unchangeable, and sex is a social construct. The situation changes yet again when a man declares he feels he is a woman. His feeling should be sufficient to enable him to obtain new legal identification and allow him access to all spaces reserved for women. In this case, feeling is all that matters and there should be no need to align sex with perceived gender. The category "woman" loses any value and anyone can claim it for himself. This does not hold true for the category "man".

the other side, as in the overstepping, going beyond genders; it does not mean the feminism of transsexual people; however, the experience of mtf transsexual people is central to its analysis[77]. The opposite of the prefix trans is the prefix cis (meaning on this side): therefore, cisgender means a person whose identity is on this side of the female or male gender norms, in agreement with one s sex at birth. According to transfeminism, cisgender women have the great privilege of living within the comfort zone of their own sex: they do not experience any gender dysphoria[78]. Therefore, cis women, having privilege, should move over and make room for so-called trans women: people of the male sex who feel they are female by gender, and so are much more discriminated and stigmatized. A cunning subterfuge to silence all women. The consciousness of belonging to the class of women does no longer means that this consciousness has revolutionary value. It does not matter how exploited, mistreated, attacked we are, we women have our wonderful cis privilege!
We reject the definition of cisgender: we believe that women can claim our identity as women and this does not imply that we accept the impositions of female gender. If, as transactivists state, women are women not because we were born women but only because of the way we perceive ourselves and because we perform traditional femininity, then mtf people, who undoubtedly perform conventional femininity with much greater skill than most women, are the true cisgender women (on this side of gender), and many lesbians who do not adhere to the canons of traditional femininity, are transgender (on the other side of gender). Mtf people use the stereotypes of fabulous femininity as if they were frozen realities and then proceed to extol them. This means they are doing exactly the opposite of what feminists intend to do, that is, destroy genders

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77. The first Transfeminist Manifesto by Emi Koyama is focused on the experience of mtf people. The author has since broadened her vision.
https://lesbitches.wordpress.com/2018/07/13/manifesto-transfeminista/ translated by the collective Les Bitches.

78. Gender dysphoria means that a person identifies with the opposite sex and rejects their own. It is the expression that is currently used by the medical profession to indicate the psychological distress of transsexual people. This substitutes the diagnosis of paraphilia connected to crossdressing fetichism , that was previously used to diagnose mtf people.

altogether[79]. In any case, a mtf can perform conventional femininity instead of destroying it, but cannot change into a female.

Transactivists believe that sex is irrelevant when it comes to deciding who is a woman and who is a man. They all declare that it s not the vagina that makes a woman nor is it the penis that makes a man, but they forget that it s the vagina that makes the female and the penis that makes the male. If, as the transactivists say, sex is irrelevant, how do we interpret the statements made by those who perceive a lack of alignment between their biological sex and their gender? To assert that sex is nonexistent undermines the very foundation of the definition of homosexuality and transsexuality. If it s not the vagina that makes a woman, must we believe that it is the innate love of pink, 3-inch-high heels, and makeup that constitutes the essence of women? Deidre O Neill, in Left censorship and exclusion against gender-critical women: a Marxist critique[80] and points out that:

> *But rather than define and defend their own rights, as gays and lesbians did, as people of colour have had to do, the trans movement makes an extraordinary and unprecedented move in the history of human rights: they want to claim not the universal rights that all people should have access to but the rights of another group (women) by claiming and appropriating their identities.[81]*

In any case, when one is fighting for space, one should wrenched it from the ruling class, from men, not from women.

On May 15, 2019, the Declaration on Women s Sex-based Rights[82] was

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79. Deidre O'Neill in Left censorship and exclusion against gender-critical women: a Marxist critique underlines: "The transgender movement is neither progressive nor radical because it has no wish to transcend the limitations of capitalism but rather to isolate the signifiers of a socially constructed femininity in order to reinforce and reproduce them. Therefore the potential for a radical rejection of a patriarchal capitalist society is impossible within trans ideology, which works to maintain the divisions that contribute to its continuing existence."
in https://rdln.wordpress.com/2019/11/17/left-censorship-and-exclusion-against-gender-critical-women-a-marxist-critique/

80. Ibidem

81. Ibidem

82. https://www.womensdeclaration.com/declaration-womens-sex-based-rights-full-

launched in New York: this document rejects the substitution of the concept of sex for that of gender identity. It lists all the threats that this conceptual confusion poses to women s rights: from the loss of freedom of expression and assembly to the withdrawal of resources, spaces and opportunities. The entry of mtfs into women s spaces is the cause of discrimination and restrictions in women s sports, the loss of protection in shelters protecting women from violence, the loss of political seats which have been reserved for women to encourage their participation. Try to imagine this process in terms of racialization and you will be shocked: no woman would accept a white person taking lots of melanin, curling his hair, declaring he is black, then demanding to have access to the opportunities created by affirmative action to benefit black people. Yet in Italy, transactivists also claim that declaring themselves to be women should be sufficient to change sex on their birth certificate[83], without undergoing any hormonal process. Sheila Jeffreys, who co-authored the Declaration on Women s Sex-based Rights, is committed to opposing these transsexual demands because they are damaging to women s rights. She explained her position in a webinar organised by ArciLesbica on May 31, 2020[84] on this very issue.

Transactivists are also calling for puberty blockers to be administered to minors who do not conform to gender expectations: this is a dangerous demand[85]. The British National Health System (NHS) has recently backtracked from its previous position, which was: the effects of treatment with analogs of GnRH are completely reversible, allowing the treatment to be interrupted at any moment after a discussion between you, your child and your multidisciplinary team[86]. Now the NHS states:

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text/ which has also been signed by many Italian feminists.

83. https://mit-italia.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Piattaforma-MIT_Rev1.pdf

84. On this occasion Sheila Jeffreys, who as a scholar, had done research on transsexuality from the psychoanalytical and psychiatric point of view, shared her findings with us. These are not contained in the Declaration.

85. For a critique of puberty blockers, Daniela Danna, La piccola principe. Lettera aperta alle giovanissime su pubertà e transizione, Vanda, 2018

86. https://web.archive.org/web/20200502223746/ https:/www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/treatment/ Translation by the women authors

We know little about the collateral and long-term effects of hormones or of puberty blockers in children with gender dysphoria. Even though the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) maintains that this treatment, if interrupted ,is physically reversible, we do not know what the long-term effects might be. Furthermore, it is not known if hormonal blockers influence the development of the brain of adolescents or the bones of children. Side effects might include hot flashes, fatigue and mood swings[87].

The Tavistock and Portman clinic in London, a model of affirmative therapy held in high regard by transactivists worldwide, was taken to court by a courageous detransitioner, Keira Bell. On December 1st, 2020, the clinic was found guilty of irresponsible practices on minors[88]. In fact, it had become an assembly line where young butch lesbians having a difficult time in adolescence, were turned into ftm, with puberty blockers and a free pass to destructive surgeries[89]. There is an increasing number of young detransitioning[90] women who reveal how the deeply desired chemical and surgical operations have had a positive benefit only in the short term. Young patients tend in fact to ask for ever more surgeries, in a continuing spiral of dissatisfaction, for the body they desire is unattainable, and the underlying emotional difficulties of transitioning are not resolved by transitioning itself: it is impossible to satisfy a yearning for meaning, by operating on the body[91].

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87. https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/treatment/ translation by the women authors

88. https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/challenge-innate-gender/?utm_source=backer_social&utm_campaign=challenge-innate-gender&utm_reference=c68ebd51bc4001c103d919c8e28cc872&utm_medium=Twitter&utm_content=post_pledge_page https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8810015/IT-worker-23-sues-NHS-gender-clinic-gave-puberty-blocking-drugs.html

89. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/feb/23/child-transgender-service-governor-quits-chaos https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/nov/03/tavistock-centre-gender-clinic-accused-fast-tracking-young-adults https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXvdrSkBFqw

90. https://twitter.com/hashtag/DetransDayOfVisibility? src=hashtag_click https://twitter.com/ImWatson91

91. https://quillete.com/2020/01/02/the-ranks-of-gender-detransitioners-are-growing-

One of the various manifestos that crowd the web, *Xenofeminism: a politics for alienation*[92], ends with the phrase: if nature is unfair, change it. And the first phrase of that manifesto is: our world is a vertigo . These phrases have shock value, but they do not provide sound philosophy. The prevailing attitude of transfeminist theories is to undervalue the emotional unity that each human being feels with and within our own body, even though many transfeminists call themselves materialists and make abundant use of the term body. Transfeminism, on the tail of deconstructionism, adopts an idealistic position that dematerializes reality, positing that language is what constructs reality and makes it comprehensible. Everything is seen as narrative. There is no doubt that a subject is compelled to represent itself; yet this does not mean that reality is simply the product of individual thinking and desire. There are material facts, such as sex (or being of woman born, or death); they can be interpreted through an historic and cultural lens, yet they are not just phantoms. The value assigned to female or male genitalia changes with cultural change; yet genitalia are not assigned at birth: they are seen and recognized at birth. Humanity is sexed, human beings are born of woman, they belong to one of the two sexes and their reproductive functions are different. We are female by birth, we are women who do not accept the normative genders of patriarchal culture. Our rebellion against genders and gender norms does not prevent us from loving our bodies and those of other women, it does not motivate us to change our body: it inspires us to change society and culture.

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we-need-to-understand-why/ https://www.transgendertrend.com/detransition https://www.detransadv.com/ https://www.piqueresproject.com/ https://www.bbc.com/news/av/health-51193849/i-used-gender-transition-as-a-form-of-escape

92. https://www.laboriacuboniks.net/it/index.html

5 What lesbian politics means in our time

Stories that shape our choral voices, our togetherness

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This year I went again to the seaside for the summer. What never changes is that the volleyball areas on the beach are always taken over by males: here they are, noisily showing off, undeterred under the sun, aged ten to sixty, fighting fiercely. If a group of women wanted to play, how would they manage to do it? Elbowing their way in to get accepted by the group, or better yet, being nice and asking permission?

At the seaside I also observe the birthday party of an eight-year-old boy, who has invited his little friends, both boys and girls, to share the cake. They play, they run after each other and hold innocuous elongated balloons. The boys hit the girls with those balloons, the girls don t defend themselves, they simply run away to avoid getting caught and taken prisoner. On the beach there is a large elevated public terrace: I see two little girls walk up there, only to have a boy push them out of the way saying: I need to talk to my friend here, go away. All of them are eight years old: the girls have been trained not to react; they seem to have swallowed the ridiculous notion that they are weaker than their male friends.

My vacation is over. I am back home, walking to the store: on the square there are lots of people. There are preteen girls perched on a wall; little boys and preteen males are managing to occupy the whole space by shouting, throwing balls with great force, and skating.

I ve had it. In this world there is no room for us: our job is obviously to be the audience, applauding these eternal children, taking care of them. Possibly our role is to parade in front of them to enhance their leisure time. I wish to look at life free of the clutter of male narcissism. Then when they get introspective it s all about looking at their belly button, their nostalgia for childhood (see above), their pathetic feeling of being misunderstood. In no time they re setting off again to go places: they become explorers, great experts, inventors, creators and you d better not laugh at them, they might kill you and then indulge in a guilt trip. I have known hypercritical gay men who work at being the anti-hero, dismantling the sexist myth, only to feel severely wounded by a less than supportive word. We women

grew up and live our lives with no expectation of support, much less that such support is due us. I want a space where I can be away from males, whether gay or straight or the ones who feel they are women; a space among women where we can share and express ourselves. That s why lesbian politics still makes a lot of sense to me.

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The seed of rebellion, the impatience with rules and injustice, the unstoppable strength that nourishes us& since forever, women have always resisted the patriarchy that crushes them without pity, trying to bend them to their stupid dictates. Women, with their inexhaustible energy, with their inordinate ability to feel, women who are inevitably free in their souls, inevitably projected into the future, as well as firmly rooted in the past.

So how can you keep from loving them, these indomitable women! The choice to love another woman was inevitable for me, because I see in her everything that represents me, as well as everything that I am missing, that I want, that I will never have, that I could learn. And when there is a relationship of love with a woman, this movement toward the other is reciprocal. When you add to this the passion for politics and for activism, the personal singular transforms into the collective plural. I see lesbianism and feminism woven tightly together. Passion for women s politics is tightly woven in with the passion for women. But even before, my girlhood memories were starred with female figures: my great grandmother and her four daughters, my grandmothers, my mother, my great-aunts, my mother s women friends, my girlfriends as a child and their mothers, my female teachers. A female world where I found every answer: I never felt the need to look elsewhere. After more than 40 years participating in collectives that started out as feminist and later became lesbian collectives, I find new lifeblood as I live, work, talk and build with lesbian women.

We are living in dark times because the whole society is working to erase what is female from daily reality. You might say there s nothing new in that: true enough, except for the particular configuration of this operation that names itself modern queer, which a number of feminists and lesbians have submitted to. Prostitution is presented as self-determination and informed consent. Maternal surrogacy appears to express freedom of choice against given obligations, and to top it off makes other people happy. Women s bodies are being used to fulfill desires

that demands to be seen as rights.
Patriarchy tightens the noose by telling feminism how feminists should be, lesbians how they should be, women how modern women should be. This is what it has always done and what it is doing now, manifesting a subtle and treacherous ability to insinuate itself into the folds of what purports to be new thinking: it does this by telling us that gender identity is fluctuating, that to feel like a woman is more important than being one, that being a woman is not genetic, that thinking one is a woman makes one a woman, given the make believe freedom within which everything is possible . Lurking behind this apparently inclusive philosophy, whose real purpose is uniformity, one finds the sinister attempt to bring back exclusively masculine thought as the summit of the world. I claim my freedom to think differently, without being attacked, insulted or discriminated against. Single minded thinking as the guiding hand of patriarchy, is something I started fighting against more than 40 years ago and that I am still fighting: I recognize it in the attempt to feminize everything in order to annul anything female. I claim my difference.

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Once same-sex marriage became legal, I noticed lesbians wavering in their political commitment. Some emphasize the social difficulties they encounter as lesbians, the isolation, the intolerance and all the forms of discrimination that still exist can you blame them? These difficulties persist, especially outside the big cities: however, even given all the actions of support that we can provide, the meaning of political struggle does not consist in services that alleviate experiences of suffering and loneliness. Other lesbians try, mostly unsuccessfully, to find meaning in lesbian politics, and they speak of emptiness, of expectancy; those who are less savvy politically get captured by what is fashionable at the moment, by rights-ism, by transfeminism, and find themselves falling into a secondary role, supporting gay men and transactivists. Still others turn to migrant women as an anchor of salvation: here are women whom it is truly worth fighting for and whose view of our reality surely is new and refreshing! This attitude does not help migrant women (it just means they remain in the role of eternally needy women) nor does it encourage political struggle: at most it might create services that make up for a lack of political struggle. I feel lucky to be a member of ArciLesbica. After an emotionally

difficult period when the organization split apart, the women who now belong to ArciLesbica have reclaimed the meaning of lesbian politics that so many women have lost. Obviously, this newly recovered meaning is not without its costs: now we are being attacked for any public statement. But this no longer matters to me. After years of reasonable activism, which was also boring and repetitive, going to Zami meetings out of affection and habit, I have rediscovered the passion of those first years, when I had just joined the movement, when everything was an adventure and all women were essential to the struggle. It is urgent to state that feminism goes to the root of the contradiction of sex, that women s bodies cannot be used as merchandise, that women s bodies are not a workplace. There are new alliances to be forged and new areas of thought to be explored. But does all this have as a starting point my being a woman or even my being a lesbian? While I believe that being a lesbian is not relevant, or only marginally so, for building a politics of rights, it is essential in the construction of a feminist position: for me and for other lesbians there is no other place to flee to for reconciliation: the consequence would be that we would become irrelevant. I feel responsible to those women who have less freedom than I do to articulate and carry on a political struggle that includes all women, that does not leave out the women who are distant from me by age, that is, girls and old women. For years I have held fast to the slogan of the *Radicalesbians manifesto*[93]: What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion! that I wrote on the sign I carried, in the nineteen-eighties, at my first demonstration as a lesbian. Now what matters to me most, more than the rage, is the meaning of my activism. And then there s the pleasure of being with lesbians. What makes me return to the group, again and again, is not a sense of duty but desire. It s not that I like all lesbians, it s that all the people I like are lesbians. Breathing is different with them. There is familiarity and a sense of recognition, but also of adventure, which I have felt at this time more than in many other times in my life. I am lucky because twice in my life I have been there, at the beginning of things: once in the early eighties and now. I hope that many

93. http://www.leswiki.it/1970/radicalesbians-the-woman-identified-woman/

other women will be able to perceive the collective dimension of this dawn, for it will not be ours to relive.

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As is true for many lesbians of my generation, one of the first lesbian books I remember reading is The Well of Loneliness by Radcliffe Hall. My first attempt to look for a lesbian group during my high school years was undoubtedly motivated by my desire to escape the destiny of loneliness and suffering that the book articulated. After that first lesbian group, called The Blue of Mitilene, came other collectives which were generally feminist, where I learned the meaning of self-determination, where I heard stories of women who tried in different ways to resist the patriarchal family system, imagining a destiny that differed from the one that seemed imposed on women from birth.

In those groups I began to think about what connects gender to power. In feminist collectives it was possible to have relationships with women based on caring and love: it was a place where we could experience sisterhood, share knowledge, adopt non-violent practices, We could come up with language that questioned the set and normative definition of what a man , a woman is; more importantly, we could question the power mechanisms that in patriarchal societies establish relationships of hegemony and subordination between the sexes. My feminist comrades taught me to deconstruct , but they did not teach me to construct or imagine my individual life path. I did not feel entitled to name myself or to talk about my difference. I had the prevailing feeling I was losing myself in an undistinguishable femaleness where I felt wanting. Until the birth of ArciLesbica I did not understand the importance of the battle for visibility and for what we might call lesbian pride . For me the dichotomy of feeling the same as/different from other women remains an open and unresolved question. On the one hand I feel that I share a common destiny with all women, having been born in a female body; on the other I continue to feel different, a refugee from the class of heterosexual women, to quote Wittig.

I experience excessive anchoring to the body as the danger of falling into an essentialist identity, but I realize that if we do not start from the material existence of the body, our discourse becomes ideological, and our identity

is denied as well. In theory it is clear to me that the category woman cannot be reduced to a single homogenous group of female individuals, because women belonging to different social groups or coming from different geographic locations live lives and experiences that are profoundly different. Haraway s thoughts, as well as those of postcolonial feminism, have taught us to speak about experiences located in the body, at the intersection of various experiences and ways of belonging. Therefore, every woman should certainly speak from her own reality, while especially acknowledging that her point of view is a partial view of things.

We wanted to use *We, the Lesbians*, as the title of our book. We know that lesbian subjectivity, which we want to investigate and which we address in our writings, is inextricably linked to and the result of institutions, laws, practices and discourse. Perhaps there is no identity in existence that predates statements and mechanisms of power. Anyway, who is a lesbian? Being accountable for oneself is never easy, because the I which I give to other women or men does not include all the facets of who I am, facets that are unconscious and often cannot be spoken, at the core of my desire.

Does We, *the Lesbians* risk denying the complexity of lived lesbian experience, which we construct by exclusions from and analogies with other women? The risk is real and yet, by resorting to the category of sex and not exclusively to the category of gender, we are able to clear up important aspects in this area. As we look closer, the prevalent popular discourse these days, concerning the undoing or the fluidity of sexual identities, only results in their proliferation within a liberalist logic, creating a supermarket of identities , which is supremely ineffective, compared to taking a real material and political stance talking about our bodies.

In other words, what queer neglects to say, is that the fluidification of the forms of sexual identity is precisely what characterizes sexuality in the late and post-patriarchal capitalism era that we are living in.

What is by now being presented as an actual ideology of free choice, has its basis in market consumerism. Therefore, if on the one hand gender performance gains value as creative play, as making things fabulous, on the other hand it has no real influence on the conditions of material subordination or on the processes of racialization. It fails to unhinge gender binarism, which is instead constantly being reinforced under our very eyes.

Returning to the sexed body is a moral imperative in an era of violence, of denial of rights, when women s body parts are being marketed, when women are being bought and sold into slavery as agricultural, domestic or caring work laborers, and bartered in the markets of prostitution and surrogacy. We thought these practices had been somewhat done away with, at least in Europe.
Unhinging the frame into which the female identity has historically been confined, allows us the pleasure of blurring the borders , but this is of no help in the battle against racial marginalization, class oppression, or the subjugation of gender.

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Throughout history love between women has been seen as the unexpected event, as many women have written, allowing me to name in words an experience that I have had many times in my life. When childhood friendships with females morphed into competitions of courage and beauty, I realized I did not want to participate, because I felt I was their ally and not their rival. What started to become intolerable for me about males was their attitude of being profoundly attached to themselves, supportive only of themselves and of the pack. I had a hard time finding a place for myself among the roles assigned to females, so I became convinced that there was something wrong with me. It wasn t the difficulty in assuming the aesthetic dictum (as I learned it was for many lesbians more masculine than I), but rather having to be nice and affable, smiling and good. Whereas the males became all the more attractive when they were defiant and daring, when they abused weaker people, when they fell into empty silences or tested their strength: all the females, girls as well as adult women, seemed to fall under their spell. I couldn t understand why. It was at that time that I heard the word lesbian on television, The word immediately had an unpleasant sound: when my mother repeated it, it sounded like a curse word, it meant hating men. I didn t hate them, and I loved my dad, yet something wasn t right, that word had something to do with me, and I secretly said to myself: I am a lesbian.
I had no access to anything to do with lesbians: it took a few years before the internet became a way to relate to people on a daily basis: until then I had to depend on my imagination. I imagined lesbians looked like Xena, the invincible woman warrior forged in the fire of a thousand battles, the

one I saw in the trailer of my favorite series. Lesbians looked like Angelica Houston. Mysterious, gorgeous and protective, the lesbians in my mind had the features of women scientists, great female movie stars, women poets, policewomen. They looked like the girl I danced with in class, the woman next door or the picture of a woman in my history book: they were everywhere, and I fantasized about the day when I would meet them.
As time went on, they seemed to become increasingly mythological, hidden who knows where. I wondered when they would appear. I was sure I would recognize them immediately by their excellent qualities. Then the internet finally reached my house and so did a personal computer with which I could do research. I was 16: I discovered that there were books and films about lesbians as well as associations that I had never heard of. I was astonished to discover that the parade they called Gay Pride didn t just take place in New York or Berlin but also in Italy, in Milan, not far from me& This had always been nearby, and I didn t know it.
But I still could not go to Milan by myself, so I signed up nervously to attend a women s forum. It was a shock! I remember that the first message I received was from a woman who wrote are you lesbian or bisexual? : it was the first time someone had asked me that and I thought it was a scary question and a clumsy one. These interactions troubled me. I was faced with having to define who I was, and yet the same women who asked the question seemed as insecure as I was, as confused, sometimes having a desperate need for closeness in the unexplored space of sudden, unexpected love between women.
A short while later in a chat I met a sweet, beautiful girl my own age: we wrote each other for a long time, then we met and fell in love and for a few years I stopped asking myself who the lesbians were.
I was having an entirely different set of problems to think about: the time to come out into the world had arrived. Calling myself a lesbian has been more difficult than being one: inside you feel it s natural to prefer women, but having to declare yourself openly is a test of courage every single time. Since I understood that the challenge of living in freedom also concerned my fiancÈe, as well as all our lesbian friends, therefore all lesbians, I felt like doing something more for them, for me. When I was twenty I got involved in lesbian politics after I heard a member of ArciLesbica speak in Pavia about gay parenting. I understood almost nothing they were talking about in that debate, and the word homoparenting re-

minded me of monozygotes and other biological eccentricities. But the woman from ArciLesbica who spoke in Pavia reminded me of my childhood fantasies about lesbians. She was strange, indomitable, angry: she was Xena, Angelica Houston, a woman astronaut; she was gorgeous. Those were the lesbians I had been looking for since I was 10 years old! I learned they were called feminists, and from that day on I told everybody that I was a feminist too, as well as a lesbian, and I warned them: who knows how many more people I would learn to be! Feminist lesbians, the women of ArciLesbica, taught me how to be in the world, they are my second mothers, my second love, because the first one is my real mother.
It didn t take me long to learn the importance of women s politics. Encountering feminism is the first step towards one s own symbolic and material freedom, towards every woman freedom. It s not always easy, in fact the disagreements and the divisions within feminism are extremely painful, yet they are inevitable and perhaps necessary because, as important women have said, feminism is a battle ground.
But for me it is also a home, it is the only space where I believe it is possible to rethink the world in order to make it better, where I have learned to love myself and other women, outside the bounds of male logic and male definitions of the world. And as I think back to myself as a little girl, feminism is what I wish for all small female creatures of the world to encounter.

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I do understand the pain of being uncomfortable in one s body. I experienced this when for a time, thankfully a short while, I suffered from eating disorders. In the stories I have read about trans people s lives I have found echoes of my own troubled adolescence. I too was a prisoner of the mirror, I demanded that it reflect the image of myself I had in mind: it insisted instead on reflecting a girl who was not me. The mirror hounded me, it kept following me on every reflective surface, every shop window or car window: the answer it gave me was always the same: you are fat and you always will be, no matter what you do.
In the struggle to make what one desires coincide with what one is, whoever has greater tenacity wins, and there is the risk of identifying excessively with the struggle, because except for this you don t feel anything, you re only miserably alone with your own anguish. In the struggle with

yourself you are somebody, you re doing something, you re an active woman, you have a goal and once you reach it, you ll feel better. This is what you believe. There are support groups where anorexic girls encourage each other not to cave in to hunger, to fatigue, to other people s pressure. Other people may have an important role in reconnecting you with the principle of reality that might save you, but only you can save yourself when you understand that you, your image, your desire, your soul, are a unit, inseparable from your body. Sometimes putting oneself aside and looking at others helps to put one s conflicts in perspective, accepting oneself and avoiding excessive insistence on self-identification.
What feminism has taught me is to know my body and give value to it, to my relationships, to my desires. What the experience of T asks me to take as my identity (that is: gender), is the opposite of what feminism has taught me up till now.
Does the Trans woman exist? I want to ask myself this, and this question is as legitimate as asking oneself if woman exists. I understand the need to subvert the entrenched roles that, throughout the world and in all eras and cultures, weigh upon males but most especially upon females. I try to see being able to consider reality simply fruit of the imagination as an opportunity I am being offered. Even so, the world as I see it is still dear to me, and I care about its problems, which won t get resolved by daring abstractions.
There remains for me an indissoluble difference, the sexual difference, corroborated by my very existence as a lesbian in this world. Why should I ask myself does the lesbian exist? . Upon my word , I exist as much as reality exists. I also understand that undoing the gender system is an act of freedom (even if I am still trying to grasp the difference, for women, between a world dominated by the neutral male and one dominated by the neutral asterisk), but I would like to ask you fancy male academics with multiple international publications: how do you reconcile the non-existence of gender, or of sexes if you wish, with the desire that some people have to belong to the opposite sex? A desire that you fancy males defend with all your might. What does it mean to aspire to be a woman if we say women don t exist?
The answer is simple, women don t exist unless those who demand to be women are trans women.
What you most want to eradicate, more than anything in the whole world,

is not genders, sexes and not even reality, but female freedom and the essential power that women possess to give life, and therefore death. Women will never be forgiven for that. In these years of female penises[94] and front holes, the transqueer community has written one horror film after another and the pharmaceutical companies and the biowork market have written formidable sequels: compared to these, Argento s films are romantic comedies. Heaven forbid you should mention the vagina, which is an exclusionary term, and do not insist on using the female pronoun when referring to women. The a ending for female nouns in Italian is bourgeois and reactionary, the asterisk is better, but do not hesitate to use the female pronoun if you re among coquettish males who talk to each other like this: Luca (Luke), you re a stupid girl . Forgive my irreverent rendering of those prestigious queer theories, my comments fall on deaf ears all the time (and anyway, even time doesn t exist, Einstein said so and I do believe him).

94. https://giovannidallorto.wordpress.com/2019/02/12/ancora-sul-pene-femminile/ https://theconversation.com/can-a-woman-have-a-penis-how-to-understand-disagreements-about-gender-recognition-101991 https://www.autostraddle.com/you-need-help-how-to-be-a-trans-lesbian

6 Girls continue to fall in love

Did we worry too much? Girls continue to fall in love, unaware of the presumed extinction of woman.
Love keeps on happening between women who know the difference between a man and a woman. They feel the difference, it permeates their lives, and their emotions arise from the fact that they are both women.
Because it s true, many men and even some women seem to feel that as women we don t matter. Re-reading feminism as if the movement had been a laudable if naÔve precursor of queer accomplishes the following annexation: queer removes women from their role as subjects who oppose sexism, replacing them with unconventional male subjectivities; queer removes femicide from our central focus and says that homophobic/transphobic violence is what is important; queer relegates the research into women s history (already so little known) to the back burner, erasing women by considering them a linguistic construct that is unstable and permeable. What is happening here is that our identity is being occupied, or rather stolen from us, from female humanity, while in turn we lesbians are reduced to nothing but a noun. Even people of the male sex want to be recognized as lesbians. If we give our consent, we will be rewarded by having a place in the fabulous queer merry-go-round, where you can encounter various specific entities, whose common thread is their rebellion against impositions on sexuality.
This theory is wrong because it does not have anything to do with the material reality of life or with the way we feel. Yet there are women who support it and spread it, attracted by male transgression, which they see as more radical, reacting as they did when they were girls in awe of the audacity of male games.
Are these the realities we really want to minimize and remove from our focused attention: child brides? female genital mutilation? the exclusion of females from education? domestic violence of males against women and against the children who witness such violence? the exclusion of women from professions and our lower salaries? the theft of women s intellectual discoveries? having our own vision of culture denied? reducing women to objects that have no intelligence? accepting rape as ethnic cleansing? rape? the trafficking of women? sex trade? virginity? loathing

women s menstrual cycle? forbidding women s access to paid work? taking away their children? The above is a list of what has been done and is being done by men against women according to the rights written into law by patriarchal/fratriarchal societies. Are we equating all this to other hateful but different violations? No.

Since the beginning of its political journey, the lesbian movement has adopted Wittig s statement Lesbians are not women[95]. What did she mean? She wanted to denounce the destiny we were allotted, that of being a man s partner. At the same time, she was affirming that we would not follow in the steps of women who subjected themselves to humiliating relationships. In the refusal to take on the female difference there is rage and suffering and a leap forward: today we want to speak our rage, and suffering and take a leap forward, not by attacking women who are in servitude, but instead attacking those who set up that servitude, perhaps stating: Lesbians are not men .

Monique Wittig pronounced her famous aphorism in the exasperating context of the nineteen-seventies, when the feminist movement was silent about lesbianism. Repeating the phrase in today s context is very different: female and male homosexuality have found their place in public discourse. Yet many women, especially the revolutionary ones, whether lesbian or not, feel the need to rid themselves of the name woman so that they don t look like the women who submit/assimilate into the normative sexual order. That s why they accept men calling themselves women: it s an identity they want to free themselves of, which seems to acquire the value of rebellion only if claimed by a man. This reeks of misogyny.

During the times of the prohibition of homosexuality, a woman might happen to fall in love with another woman. Now, in freedom, it still happens. The truth is, young women have always had exclusive relationships with a girlfriend or a best friend, but then most often they would make themselves get over it. But for some the experience kept happening and the lucky ones met each other. Love is love, they say, and it is true that human loves have similar traits: a sense of disorientation, the overwhelming emotion caused by feeling able to start life all over again, the dream

95. Monique Wittig, The straight mind, 1980 in The straight mind and other essays, Harvester Wheatsheaf 1992

of fulfilling the best part of oneself thanks to the other person. Love between women is like any love, yet it has its own characteristics: here admiration takes the place of envy, love bursts out of the unexpected fullness of being that two women experience, love imposes absolute choices on a woman who is usual exempt from these. Love causes two women to become creative, to invent, to enter an activist dimension when interpreting the differences between two similar people. For a female couple, the difference which activates desire is not sexual difference, but something else one might call psychological difference.

We were all supposed to be heterosexual, women and men, and yet something happens and suddenly you have a lesbian or a gay man, someone who deviates from the prevailing norm. In some cases, this deviation has a progressive value. Since our sexuality is independent from men, all lesbians, even if not feminists, find ourselves in a transformative, progressive position, often without specifically wanting this and without full awareness of it. This is because we create an erotic field closed to male access, something no one else does. On this premise one can then build political and theoretical points of view.

But the fact remains that lesbians find themselves in a position which is objectively transformative.

Even when they wish to be a part of patriarchy, lesbians are nonetheless women who swim against the current; lesbian desire remains revolutionary, since it exists outside the stereotypes meant to keep women in a cage. The lesbian lover is a woman who has not surrendered, even as everything around us conspires to make us surrender to the only possibilities we are offered. Love makes us ask: who am I, when I desire a woman? Love is also tenderness, reactivating the interrupted or uninterrupted love for the mother. Why is it that a man, after receiving his mother s tenderness when he was a child, can continue to draw on the tenderness of women, and we cannot? We know we can. And our desire is the desire to be reason of pleasure for her, to deserve exploring her senses to reach her center, shortening the distance between us as much as possible; our desire is for her to do the same, in order to reveal to us our own unknown center. Who am I, when I desire a woman? is a question birthed by the anxiety we felt in the past, The answer is simple and self-evident: I am fully myself. Love is love, but women who continue to fall in love are free of the encumbrance of fixed roles. Girls who keep choosing

each other and who are exploring together how to live life, do not wish to have men present at the core of what is important to them. These are the lesbians. Reality is stronger than ideologies, lesbianism has been stronger than psychoanalytical theories which called us sick and made us sick; it is stronger than transfeminist theories, which want us to become obsolete.
In astronomy, they call a double star system one which is made up of two stars moving around each other and around a center of mass belonging to both, held together by mutual gravitational attraction.
These stars have different colors, luminosity and mass. The evolution of one star may be strongly conditioned by the presence of its partner. In the lesbian universe as well, the force that moves us is desire, desire that signifies that something is lacking, and therefore, in contrast, that a passionate search is needed. The search for a lost origin, for a body like our own yet different, for authoritative gestures, for a voice capable of producing vibrations. For a troubling presence, not necessarily a guarantee of security, but which mysteriously expands space and time.
The lesbian lover is a woman who has not surrendered.

7 What we want

- We want women, girls and old women to live life in freedom.
- We want to make love that has nothing to do with possession or the marketplace.
- We want to remember the women who have come before us
- We want to adopt
- We want to increase the number of women s spaces and expand them
- We want to turn off the computer and dedicate ourselves to relationships
- We want to respect the environment as well as animals and humans
- We want to love the body as it is
- We want to say what we think even if it s not convenient
- We want to have courage

We live in interesting times. Some say they are complex, but the present is always complex for those who are living in it and don t have the benefit of hindsight. Furthermore, to say that a period or a problem is complex often becomes a justification for sluggishness, just as the invitation to a moderate debate becomes an excuse for inactivity. This is why we prefer to say that these times are interesting, and the challenges formidable.
During the suspended time of the quarantine in the spring of 2020, the state of things has become visible with incontrovertible clarity. We have seen that the system is unable to provide what people need an efficient health care system, dignified work, public services in the hands of privateshareholders.
Capitalism is finished, not because this oppressive system has ended, but because we can no longer believe its claim that it is the best of all possible economic systems, the only rational and efficient one, capable of pulling out of poverty ever increasing masses of people. We have seen that its rationality is a myth: how could we believe a system to be rational when it allows whole populations to starve in order to keep a few banks afloat? Instead of bettering the situation of those who are poor, this system augments the wealth of those at the top of the pyramid, increasing

the distance between those who have and those who have not. The great majority of women (as well as some men) know that this system is not working. That much is sure. What is more difficult, is identifying who is going to have the strength to build the alternative to it.
We will not list here a catalogue of demands nor a series of recipes to solve the evils of the system. The women s movements round the world have already articulated solutions. The women s program exists and it points in an anticapitalistic direction. We women all know what really matters: relationships, the environment, time. We women all know what reassures us: the solidarity of a community, a social state that functions well. We women all know what we want: a full life where our work has dignity, where we can have time for ourselves, for our affections and for our passions.
The time of coronavirus has not been a void. We have seen things happen with unexpected swiftness: we have seen that alternatives exist, that constraints that held us down can be gotten rid of in a sudden move. We can think in more daring terms, some taboos can be broken. The virus running all over the planet has brought many forms of suffering but has also allowed the potential for change to manifest in a flash and has swept away, at least in the collective vision, many obstacles. We have been able to see that what matters to us are relationships: from the strongest ones that get our hearts beating fast when anxious about the well-being of our loved ones, to the lesser ones, like the habitual presence of coworkers, and the chance encounters in queues at supermarkets, which allowed us to feel less isolated in our bubble. We have seen that we miss beauty, the beauty of nature, of art and the beauty of being able to make plans for the future.
To politicians we say toput all this back in the center: the common good, the dignity of every person, the value of work (upon which our Italian Republic is founded) and the reconstruction of the social state. Set limits to the arrogance of financial and multinational institutions. We know, however, that telling the politicians is not enough. We must impose it on them, together we must shout it out so that they cannot ignore us as they have done in the past. We also need to start making some changes right away. The changes of feminism are rooted in our lives.
We value the interdependence of human beings, we think that bodies are not disposable, we respect nature, knowing that natural resources are limited, which means we must take care of the environment.
This is the compass of our activism. The perseverance of women is what has kept the world alive till now. The strength of women is overwhelming when we band together. Banding women together is our passion, the passion of lesbians.

Appendix

We wish to thank Olivia Broustra for allowing us to publish her text and we thank Alessandra Guizza Lanivi for her translation of the text into Italian.

Well done.
You got a trans woman to be considered enough of a woman to be put in the woman s prison. You put a rapist into a woman s prison, and you made that ok. You let women get harassed by rapist until the rapist was moved to solitary. You made that ok. Because the validation of the trans person mattered more.
Well done.
You kicked two women out of a women s shelter. Because they were concerned that an intact (penis and balls) male would be in the their safe space. Because the trans persons feelings mattered more.
Well done.
You ve made it cool to threaten women with violence. As long as you call her a terf, its ok. She deserves it. Transphobic bitch deserves to be beat right? Women getting punched at protests is fine since they were Terfs.
Well done.
You bully people who do not want sex with you. Label them transphobic. Because your validation matters more.
You ve created new laws that allow any male to enter the sex segregated spaces of the female. As long as that male states, I am woman , he is believed and allowed in. So now female spaces, created for safety, are all access passes. Because trans people matter more.
Well done.
You threaten places to use inclusive language and bullied those who still said female genital mutilation, pregnant woman, and dared speak about vaginas.
You ve convinced the world that speaking about female anatomy is not inclusive, is bigoted.
Well done.
You ve convinced the world that trans women have more right to speak about women s rights, participate in women s sports, hold women s spaces in politics then women.
You ve convinced the world that males are women. And you sacrificed women in the process.
Because you suffer from a narcissistic, egotistical, misogynistic view that you matter more. That you deserve more.
You did not fight for trans spaces. You fought for women s. And you steamrolled over women in the process.
You did not say I am trans and thats ok, now let s fight against male violence together. You demanded we call you woman, demanded we allow you in womanhood, and you threatened those who disagreed.
You demand the world fall at your feet instead. You demand the world worship your needs above all others. Especially above women.
When we ask what is woman, you say, a feeling . When woman is meant to mean adult human female.
You call vaginas front holes and surgically altered and inverted penises vaginas. Because you need to be more woman than woman despite the fact that you cannot ever be woman, by woman s own definition.
But the funny thing is, your ego will be your downfall.
I was prepared to fight for your right to trans spaces. I was prepared to support you when you bitched about having less dating options. Prepared to call you she if it made you feel better. Prepared to fight for your right to healthcare, and respect. Prepared to fight against gender and male violence against you. I was prepared to be your ally. Many women felt the same. Many terfs started as allies.
But then you said no. I don t want trans spaces, I want yours. I want your vagina, your female spaces, I want you to stop using your words, I want you to stop talking about your body, I want to destroy you in your sports, take your places in public offices, schools, and organizations. I WANT YOUR WOMANHOOD. And you expected me to comply. To hand it over. And you ve convinced many to do just that.
But women talk in the shadows about the truth. You cannot ever change sex. You can mimic the stereotypes of women, you can mimic our bodies, though considering the uterus, ovum, cervix, clit, pelvic floor, its a fairly poor mimic. You can feminize your face, though as an androgynous female thats a bit offensive, take voice lessons, and walking lessons, but you can never live the experience of being born female. You can never turn a male into a female so in truth sex change is a misnomer. You can

never experience being born woman.
And that should have been ok with you. There is nothing wrong with admitting you are not the opposite sex. there is nothing wrong with having dysphoria and admitting that you are trans. There is nothing wrong with not fitting in with your natal sex. You can be something unique. And indeed if you look at the hundreds of ways trans people express their transness, every trans person is unique. But all trans people are trans. But you decided that wasnt enough to fight for. It wasn t enough to fight for your own unique being. At least it wasn t enough for the male trans activists who became the loudest most volatile part of the movement. Instead you feel you must police the rest of the world into validating your dysphoria. But listen:
We don t tell anorexics that their body dysmorphia is right and that they are fat.
We did not turn every restroom stall in the world into a disabled access stall.
We don t force people to fuck incels.
We didn t ban peanuts from existence when many people became deathly allergic.
We did not allow Rachel Dolezal to claim transracial.
And we shouldn t be forced to sacrifice the needs and issues and concerns and spaces of 50% of the population for your minuscule undefinable group.
Most people who don t fit in the norms, find ways to cope, they create support groups for themselves, spaces for themselves. Because most people get that life is not going to be fair for everyone, cater to everyones needs. The more you fight to destroy women s right to woman, the more enemies you create.
You ve managed to piss off lesbians and straight men for telling them its transphobic to not want your lady dick.
You ve managed to piss off women by trying to claim womanhood and destroy our earned fought for spaces and condemn our need for safety as hate.
You ve pissed off parents by trying to convince them their nonconforming child is trans and should have medicalized puberty blocking that can leave children underdeveloped and sterile. Bye bye grandkids and even future sex lives sometimes.

You ve turned your own allies against you by becoming hostile at mere questions.
You ve united women of color, white women, men, conservatives, liberals, moderates, lesbians, gay men, even de-transitioned trans people against you.
So well done.

P.S. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.

The Authors

Biographical Notes

The authors are activists with ArciLesbica and live in Milan.

Flavia Franceschini, dancer and choreographer, is a radical lesbian feminist activist. She co-founded A.D.O.N.A.I. (Association of Women Organized in International Art) in the 1980s.

Lucia Giansiracusa, radical feminist, atheist, and communist.

Cristina Gramolini, teacher; she recently wrote "Frattura scomposta", published in the anthology Odissea embrionale (Mimesis, 2019), about the controversies within the lgbt movement regarding surrogacy.

Stella Zaltieri Pirola studied at the Arsenale Theatre School in Milan; mathematician, feminist, interested in ecology and anti-capitalism.

Sabina Zenobi, feminist, teacher, former activist of the Communist Refoundation Party, has been engaged for several years in union work with FLC-CGIL in Cremona.