



Italian Queer Transfeminism Towards a Gender Strike

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In this chapter, I will review a number of trajectories and projects stemming from the transfeminist movement, with particular attention to Italy and Southern Europe, in order to highlight what I believe to be the defining posture of transfeminist epistemologies, that is, the capacity to provide a structural analysis of gender violence and gender binarism that allows for a multidimensional, intersectional mobilization. This structural reading is achieved primarily by adopting a materialist analysis of the construction of gendered and sexual subjectivity. The iconic political practice that mobilizes the results of this reading is a call for a gender strike; this strategy of mobilization, I argue, highlights the collective potentials and individual limits of the capacity to choose. In the following paragraphs, after an introduction to the field and its genealogy, I will offer a reading of examples of activism in relation to academic labour and gender labour. I argue that the following cases of transfeminist readings and practices fruitfully question “two domains too often understood to operate autonomously: the psychic realm of desire and the material realm of accumulation and

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exchange” (Wesling, 2012, p. 108). At the intersection of these two realms rests the issue of choice, central to any sociological attempt to understand the relationship between agency and structure or aspirations and opportunities (Giddens, 1984). In the following cases, the issue of choice emerges in different ways. First, it appears in the deliberate, agentic choices made by activists to define the field by adopting a performative use of language; this is achieved with the adoption of localized terms (vs the adoption of Anglo-American queer jargon) and with the very act of self-naming one’s political agenda as transfeminist. Secondly, the issue of choice emerges in the struggles for bodily autonomy and self-determination, which are central in the genealogy of Marxist feminism; this field will be an important antecedent in the development of the trajectory that proceeded from the Marxist feminism reproductive labour strike to the transfeminist gender strike. Thirdly, it emerges in the contemporary critique of academic labour put forward by transfeminist scholars who choose to interrupt the exploitation of queer embodied value by the academic industry. Ultimately, the issue of choice tests the limits of the refusal of care work, gender labour and the interruption of social reproduction that is implied in the figure of the gender strike. If our possibility to choose is always patterned by the gender structure (Risman, 2004), can we choose to strike from gender?

THE SUBJECTS OF TRANSFEMINISM

Originating from the Spanish context (Solá & Urko, 2013), transfeminist networks gained pervasive international circulation after the publication and translation in several languages of the “Manifiesto para la Insurrección Transfeminista” (Red PutaBolloNegraTransFeminista, 2010), authored by the network “PutabolloNegraTransFeminista” in 2009 and circulated from the platform of transcultural artistic collective “ideadestroyingmuros”.¹ The multiple contexts behind the collective authoring of the manifesto shared the Catalan culture of a radical politics of sexuality characterized by a marked diversity of subjectivities converging in the struggle. Not only women—be they cis or trans—but

¹“Ideadestroyingmuros” describe themselves as a “transcultural collective of poetical militancy and uneducative activism” and keep an updated blog at <http://ideadestroyingmuros.blogspot.com/>.

sex workers, people with functional diversity,² butches, fags and transgender and non-binary people of different races and citizenship status participated in a variety of feminist political practices. The vexed question of the proper subject of feminism is addressed in the document as follows:

We have outgrown “women” as the political subject of feminism, as it is in itself exclusive: it leaves out the dykes, trans, the whores, the ones who wear veils, the ones who earn little and don’t go to the university, the ones who yell, the immigrants without legal resident papers and the fags. (Red PutaBolloNegraTransFeminista, 2010, n.p.)

Debates about the proper subject of feminism have stirred the movement since its inception and continue to be relevant today. At times of expansion of feminist debates towards post-feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018) and femonationalism (Farris, 2017), feminism risks being brought into the fold of the conservative right (Farris & Rottenberg, 2017; for an Italian case, see Arfini et al., 2019), neoliberal agendas (Rottenberg, 2018) or trans-exclusionary campaigns (Pearce et al., 2020). The exclusionary effects of a vision of feminism based on ontological identity politics are addressed here not by a reformist action of inclusion of further identities but by the deconstruction of the very idea of identity-based political subjectivity. It is clear that the “the ones who yell” (ibid.) could never consolidate into an identity, but together they surely could build tactics of creative confrontation in the public sphere, for example. Likewise, evoking those who “don’t go to university” does not clearly identify a population and yet can point towards the issue of grassroots knowledge production and epistemological authority outside the academic industrial complex.

Subjectivities in the text appear to be framed according to a primacy of embodied experience. For example, to point out a frame resonance with intersectional anti-racist feminism, “the ones who wear veils” (ibid.) is preferred over the mention of Muslim women; likewise “the ones who earn little” (ibid.) may point to a experiential base that cross-cuts more conventional sociological stratification labels such as the working class, the cognitive and creative precarious workers or the precariat (Savage et al., 2013). Finally, at the performative level, the text deploys the classic queer

²I adopt the use of this term from the Spanish context (Romañach & Lobato, 2005), where it is preferred to the most common elsewhere “people with disability”. Functional diversity highlights the neutral difference of bodies, without reference to their negative social interpretation.

strategy of the reappropriation of homophobic insults and sexist slurs. Just like the term *queer* has been performatively mobilized to reclaim and resignify what was once originally a slur (Seidman, 1996, p. 414), here the texts call for the mobilization of “the whores” and “the fags”. It is important here to note how such terms are always used in their localized form, thus differing in each language translation, a result of the choice not to use the universal term “*queer*”.

One powerful effect of transfeminism, indeed, is the possibility it brings of localizing and—I would argue—provincializing the Anglophone term “*queer*”. The circulation and reception of *queer* lexicon and ideas in non-Anglophone contexts is yet to be systemically inquired into (Downing & Gillett, 2011). In the Italian context, the introduction of the term was met with scepticism from several parts of the LGBT movement (as well as from within academia). I was able to keep track of the lines of resistance first hand during the dozens of public presentations of “*Canone Inverso*” (Arfini & Lo Iacono, 2012), the first anthology of foundational Anglo-American *queer* texts to appear in Italian translation. The free labour of several comrades who volunteered to translate the original articles and of the curators made it possible for the first time to test the context of reception and decoding practices of a larger sample of LGBT readers. For some, *queer* theory was perceived to be a disembodied, elitist and hyper-theoretical product of American intellectual imperialism. For others, the term was too strongly associated with theories produced by the standpoint of gay male subjectivity. It is worth noting here that, despite being responsible for the very aetiology of the term *queer* theory, the work of Teresa de Lauretis on lesbian desire did not enjoy a robust circulation in feminist and lesbian feminist Italian networks. Likewise, contributions such as those of Ann Cvetkovich on butch-femme sexuality or of Jack Halberstam (1998) on female masculinities have been introduced 12 years later in translation (Halberstam, 2010). As a result, *queer* theory in Italy has been indeed initially associated more with thinkers such as Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman or Eve K. Sedgwick. I would also argue that this association has also been strengthened by the reputation of the figure of Mario Mieli,³

³ Mario Mieli’s persona and style of militancy, as well as his theoretical, literary and theatrical writings, were deemed controversial and outrageous at his time and beyond. A leading gay activist in the nascent Italian movement, he is best known for his major theoretical work, “*Homosexuality and Liberation: Elements of a Gay Critique*” (1980), which draws upon Marx and psychoanalysis to address the relationship between heteronormativity and capitalism. The most recent English edition of his work (Mieli, 2018) is prefaced by Tim Dean.

who, after the introduction of queer theory into the Italian context, enjoyed a revival of popularity as a thinker who could at this point be understood as proto-queer. The anticipatory lead of Mieli was pinned on his celebration of the perverse polymorphous and on his pioneering attempt to link queer struggle with anti-capitalist struggle. Later, the term queer began circulating more outside of the field of theoretical knowledge production and into popular culture, by virtue of its function as an umbrella term but at the same time losing its performative potential of a derogatory term in non-translation. As Serena Bassi (2017) notes, the term queer remains always partially foreign to local political cultures. This is why queer movements in Italy⁴ have often preferred to adopt a localized lexicon, such as “frocia” or “trans-frocio-lella”, allowing the queering of language not to be lost in translation. They have also responded to other southern localizations, such as the ones proposed by the “Manifiesto para la Insurrección Transfeminista”, a document which enjoyed robust circulation within Italian queer collectives. It could be argued that the deliberate choice of non-Anglo-American activists to adopt a localized lexicon contributes to the formation of a field populated by different localizations, each diverse and yet tied by their choice to invest in the creation of a unique language and by their practices of translation from south to south, from margin to margin.

Southern transfeminism thus mobilizes a broad array of deviant sexual subjects, in a different way from its Anglo-American counterpart. Indeed, Anglo-American feminisms has a longer infamous history of exclusion of trans women from women-only spaces, which they would allegedly invade (Stone, 1991), and likewise of sanctioning trans masculine people as traitors and partakers in patriarchal privilege (Salamon, 2008). In contrast with these aberrations of feminism, amongst the earliest call for transfeminism in the Anglophone area is indeed a manifesto where transfeminism is defined as “a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond” (Koyama, 2003, p. 244).

Even if it mobilizes a wider variety of subjects, transfeminism does maintain a specific focus on transgender issues. For example, in 2009 hundreds of Southern collectives joined the Spanish-initiated Stop Trans

⁴Likewise Spanish queer movements use the term “transmaricabollo” or in French “transpedèguine”.

Pathologization (STP) campaign.⁵ Most active between 2009 and 2018, STP campaigned for trans specific struggles, such as the removal of the classification of gender diversity from mental disorder diagnostic manuals, the institution for universal trans health care based on an informed consent model, legal gender recognition and the prevention and combat of transphobic violence. These are all issues that can be understood as feminist and that can be informed by feminist genealogies, not just because they express the need of a particular group of women (they actually also express the need of non-hegemonic masculinities and of non-binary people) but more structurally because they tackle issues of bodily autonomy and self-determination, health and sexual citizenship.

These are precisely the issues that have been crucial to feminism and the struggles that have achieved the largest mobilization in feminist social movements. Struggles in the same arena are not entirely won in the feminist field, either. For example, campaigns on reproductive rights were fundamental in mobilizing Italian feminists against the backlash on access to abortion. I argue that the transfeminist reading on reproductive citizenship (Rosencil et al., 2013) is heavily influenced by the recuperation of Marxist feminist theory and of strategies of the Wages for Housework movement. The strategy of the strike, in particular, was first proposed as a call to mobilization against unpaid reproductive labour and will later become central again in contemporary transfeminist mobilizations.

GENEALOGIES OF QUEER TRANSFEMINIST MATERIALISM

In order to reconstruct the genealogy of the trajectory from reproductive labour strike to gender strike, I will first provide a brief summary of the Wages for Housework campaign, started in Italy in 1972 (Dalla Costa, 1972). Before looking at its transnational resonance, it is worth recalling the peculiar historical circumstances of the Italian case. Indeed, Italian second-wave feminism formed around an anti-integrationist stance critical of the emancipatory equality politics of existing institutional groups. In the context of generalized social conflict and unrest initiated in 1968, feminists organized towards the construction of an autonomous political subject within the larger countercultural uprising of the student movement and of the extra-parliamentary left. The strand of Italian feminism

⁵The platform materials, available at www.stp2012.info, are translated into Spanish, English, French, German, Italian, Turkish and Portuguese.

that soon became hegemonic and remained so for a long time, focused its politics on the reconfiguration of the symbolic order. Influenced by French feminisms (in particular by the writings of Luce Irigaray and by the “Politique et Psychanalyse” group and its leader Antoinette Fouque), Italian feminism eventually consolidated into what is known as the “pensiero della differenza sessuale” [thought of sexual difference] (Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, 1990). Groups, intentionally kept small, focused on the practice of unconscious, a sort of group analysis inspired by clinical analysis, practised among women on a horizontal basis, thus without therapist–client roles (Melandri, 1997, 2000). Another important practice was that of “affidamento” (a term that can be loosely translated as “entrustment”), a model of female mentorship in which younger women can be empowered by an older “symbolic mother”. This strand of feminism was thus strongly dependent on separatism and on the valorization of a feminine symbolic, philosophy, artistic canon and ethics of care (Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, 1990).

In the same years, Marxist feminist analyses focused instead on the role of reproductive labour in the capitalist system (Hartmann, 1979). The labour force, they argued, is the central value upon which capital accumulation depends. In order for the labour force to be produced and reproduced, a number of tasks need to be ensured, that is, human reproduction, but also cleaning, cooking and care of children and elders. This labour is provided by women and it is not remunerated. Thus, in order not only to transform women’s condition, but to dismantle the capitalist system, it is necessary to reframe reproductive work as productive work. Demanding a salary for the work of reproduction became the political perspective that organized Italian Marxist feminism since the early 1970s (Dalla Costa & James, 1973). Albeit not reaching the same level of consensus as sexual difference feminism at the time, their campaign anticipated a number of important points relevant to contemporary transfeminist mobilization. In the 1970s, the Wages for Housework (WFH) movement in Italy had its strongest presence in the cities of Padua, Ravenna, Ferrara, Naples and Rome, but acted in concert with a transnational network that reached overseas to the UK, the USA and Canada and mobilized not only working-class White housewives but a variety of subjects, including sex workers and lesbians. The WFH campaign was based on the parallel between waged labour and housework, that is, on the necessity to recognize reproductive work as work. In her influential document authored in 1975 and

translated in the Neapolitan feminist chapter of the network in 1976, Silvia Federici writes:

They say it is love. We say it is unwaged work. / They call it frigidity. We call it absenteeism. / Every miscarriage is a work accident (...) / Neuroses, suicides, desexualisation: occupational diseases of the housewife. (Federici, 1975, p. 1)

While this might appear to be a strategy of reduction to economics, the WFH theoretical effort was actually careful in pointing out the affective implications of reproductive work. In order to maintain reproductive labour unpaid, a strong emotional investment is necessary to naturalize this work as a “labour of love”. The naturalization of unpaid reproductive labour ensures that women’s work is privatized and remains far removed from any possibility of a public, collective, organized possibility of negotiation and conflict. Emotions, desires, aspirations and ultimately one’s deeper sense of sexual identity support the recruitment of women into their reproductive roles.

I argue that this is the core epistemological move of this strand of feminism and the one that will prove to be most influential for contemporary transfeminist understandings of labour, including gender labour and the feminization of work and its tactics, including that of the strike. In 1974 on International Women’s Day in Mestre, Italy, Mariarosa Dalla Costa delivered a speech entitled “A General Strike” (Dalla Costa, 1975), arguing that no strike before has ever been a truly general strike but, instead, a strike for male workers only. The strike as a tool for political mobilization and as a figuration to expose the material condition of exploitation of gendered labour will indeed be central for the WFH movement and will become central again to contemporary transfeminist movements. One peculiar, contemporary arena in which Italian transfeminist movements address the issue of labour and its gendered component and confront it with the call for a strike is the critique of academic labour.

ACTIVISM AND ACADEMIA

Just as reproductive work has been naturalized as a “labour of love”, academic labour too may be romanticized as the fulfilment of a personal vocation over which the subject has little choice, as well as an occupation that puts to work one’s deepest sense of identity, personal ethics and ideas of

social justice. The Italian transfeminist movement, within the context of the “SomMovimento NazioAnale” network, addressed this construction and confronted the issue by using the tactic of the strike.

“SomMovimento NazioAnale” is a network of activists and queer collectives that began to meet in 2012 and promoted a variety of initiatives, both in the public space (protests and performative actions) and in squatted or self-managed spaces (assemblies, workshops, summer camps) in order to develop a transfeminist critique of austerity, homonationalism and anti-gender fundamentalism and heteronationalism (Drucker, 2016), that is, the promotion of anti-LGBTI prejudice in defence of national identities perceived as threatened.

Among the earliest reflections of the “SomMovimento NazioAnale” network, activists formed a working group on activism and academia. The composition of participants included many precarious researchers. It is worth noting that this discussion on academic labour takes place in a country, such as Italy, in which institutional recognition of the study of sexual cultures and gender, no matter from which disciplinary angle, has been superficial. At the undergraduate and graduate levels alike, the curricular positioning of gender and sexuality studies has little visibility, and trans studies are completely invisible. Given that there are no tenure lines dedicated to the field, scholars in gender, queer or trans studies struggle to secure their positions in the academic industry, which is already plagued by chronic underfunding and the perils of the neoliberalization of higher education.

The preliminary standpoint and shared experience from which the discussion started was at the intersection between queerness and precarious cognitive work and on the experience of labour exploitation and precarization. An account of these reflections is given in a collective piece of writing that, albeit published in an academic journal, is a report of the then-ongoing discussion within “SomMovimento NazioAnale” (Acquistapace et al., 2015). Here it is argued that the position of queer precarious scholars exposes subjects to unique forms of vulnerability within the already poisonous academic work environment. One is the risk of exploitation of privileged access to the field: on the one hand, professionally inquiring the political field of one’s own mobilization can provide material and temporal resources to sustain one’s activism. On the other hand, however, it can also bias one’s experience of activism, for example, by steering one’s engagement towards issues of mobilization which are more palatable to the academic industry. In fact, the most troubling aspect of this “double

presence” as activists and scholars is ultimately the extractive mechanism that appropriates knowledge created within grassroots movements to produce value for the academic industry. This extraction of value has certainly been a form of friction between the positions, because this value is not redistributed to knowledge producers embedded in the movements, which are often also precarious queer scholars. Locally, this tension reached a particularly high level during an academic conference on queer studies, held in 2017 in L’Aquila by the CIRQUE (Interuniversity Centre for Queer Research). Here, transfeminist scholars confronted with epistemic and administrative violence from the conference organization and leading panellists expressed their dissent by deserting the official panel where they were supposed to be and instead gathered in an autonomous transfeminist session. They framed this action as a strike:

We interrupted the pedagogic labour, the emotional labour and the educational labour toward the dominant classes (....) We interrupted the exhausting work of networking that is supposed to be important in maybe getting us a job one day, maybe just another underpaid job (....) We refused to comply with the imperative of “being visible”, and instead we gave visibility to the invisible work that we re-produce all the time (....) We stopped competing with each other to get the recognition of our work and we made space to exchange/share recognition among peers in a horizontal way, and to share knowledges embodied in our lives. (Transfeminist strykers from the CIRQUE Conference, 2017)

These conflicts are not unique and may indeed be confronted by any form of empirical research on social movement organizations that struggles with the tension between research *on* movements and research *for* movements (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014). However, some of the frictions between queer activism and academia are heightened not only by the general turn to neoliberal politics of evaluation and chronic public underfunding that intensifies knowledge extraction but also by the subject matter itself. As we mentioned, in Italy, the field of gender and sexuality studies has largely failed to achieve an autonomous disciplinary status. Local scholars in the field pursue their research from within departments of canonical disciplines (i.e. sociology, history, philosophy and literature) and are thus subjected to evaluation standards that do not favour interdisciplinary work. Moreover, with the intensification of anti-gender attacks on educational projects of all orders, the institutionalization of gender studies

in higher education has become even more fragile. Thus, the defence of gender studies in the academic industry has often implied renouncing the possibility of radical critique in favour of the search for legitimization. As a consequence, this conjuncture has aggravated the already present problem of the normalization of queer knowledge in order to fit evaluation standards, disciplinary methodologies, citation economies, authorial conventions and generally the call to scientific objectivity. However:

While this is doubtlessly a problem, it is not necessarily the most important one. We are far more concerned by how it is that this process transforms people themselves: (re)constructing their subjectivities, sapping their energy, sucking life from social movements (...) Most of all, it produces a model of subjectivity that is precisely the opposite of what we need in order to create radical change and enact social justice. (Acquistapace et al., 2015, pp. 66–67)

On the one hand, this critique offers a materialist analysis of the current turn to neoliberal, market-driven governance of contemporary universities and, at the same time, highlights the affective consequences, that is, the construction of an aspirational subjectivity based on free labour and competition for visibility. This forms the subjectivity of the intellectual as an entrepreneur of oneself within a political economy of promise (Fiorilli, 2014) that is based on the constant postponement of recognition. However, unlike many contributions in the field of critical university studies (Izak et al., 2017), the main aim of this critique is not simply to reform the managerialism of neoliberal universities that restricts university work (Taylor, 2014); this standpoint does not stop at internal critique but rather points towards radical counter-hegemonic knowledge practices outside the borders of academia.

I argue that this mobilization is a paradigmatic example of how trans-feminist readings are able to trace both the emotional and the material implication of labour and its gendered aspects and how the iconic practice of the strike can render visible both the conditions of exploitation and the choices of those who struggle against them. While this case referred to a specific field and labour sector, the same epistemology and strategy of mobilization is applied to very structure of gender production itself, as we will see in the following section.

DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AND QUEER VALUE

As anticipated, the genealogy of Marxist feminist interpretations of reproductive work acted as a precursor of transfeminist positions on queer readings of labour and value. Earlier in this chapter, we saw how the WFH campaign made the labour done within the household by women visible and pointed out how the cost of such labour is obscured by the production of a feminine gender consistent with the capacities put to work, that is, turning it into a “labour of love”. Later, we saw how transfeminist scholars critiqued the academic “labour of love” in its gendered and emotional components. Now, we will finally address what I argue to be the pivotal point of transfeminist critique, that is, understanding the very production of gender—any gender—as a form of labour.

Understating gender as a form of labour implies that by producing gender one produces value. The value produced by this labour is accrued in different ways for different genders. Traditionally, as we have seen, the gender produced by cis heterosexual women has been put to work in the household. Under post-Fordism and the new spirit of the capitalism (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999), those characteristics commonly associated with the production of this gender and with care work have begun to be valorised outside the household and beyond women, in a variety of job sectors and in particular in those associated with precarious, service and cognitive work. Flexible availability translates into chronic overtime, lack of regulation, legal protection and social security; undefined job descriptions call for qualities typically associated with feminine relational and emotional skills: multitasking, networking, conflict resolution, the capacity to care, mediate or seduce. This dynamic has been called the feminization of labour (Marazzi, 2011; Morini 2010; Nannicini, 2002). This meaning of the feminization of work draws from the Italian post-workerist or neo-workerist tradition and broadens the sociological notion beyond the recognition of a generalized increase in the numbers of women in the workforce and an expansion of sectors, such as the tertiary, with a predominantly female workforce.

Producing a gender is a compulsory performance based on repetition (Butler, 1990) for anyone, including non-normative gendered subjectivities. The valorization of womanhood in the household remains a phenomenal source of extraction: house care work, either unpaid or outsourced along racial lines, is still done predominantly by women. Within Europe, in Italy, women spend the highest amount of time doing domestic work

according to a gender care gap that begins from age 11 to 14 (Dotti Sani, 2018).

However, alongside the feminization of labour, diversity management is increasingly extracting value from non-normative genders (Ahmed, 2012; Ferguson, 2018). In the context of the co-optation of the lesbian/gay mainstream in a neoliberal era of homonormativity, queer liberation is increasingly understood as being dependent on inclusion in the labour market and acquisition of purchasing power (D’Emilio, 1983; Floyd, 2009). As consumers of gay tourism, gentrified house propriety, sex industry and recreational services, homosexual citizens strive for respectability and national belonging, confining queer liberation to a “demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2003, p. 50). This dynamic is perhaps more evident from the consumer’s side, but transfeminist readings provided a critique from the perspective of the necessary precedent to consumer power, that is, labour market inclusion:

We are being subjected and we subject [to diversity management] because it is believe we are more creative, more forthcoming, better suited to listen and mediate, because we allegedly smile more and present better, but also because we need social recognition. As gay, lesbians, transsexuals, queers, people with a relational status that can't be captured under any model of kinship consistent with any understating of “family”, it is believed that we don't have any relationships that distract us from our dedication to the job, and at the same time we are asked to extract surplus value from our relational networks and give it away to the company (. ...) We are supposed to be grateful and faithful to the company that exploits us because it graciously “concedes” us some of the rights the an homophobic state denies us, while at the same time earning a “friendly” image on our skins. (somMovimentozioAnale, 2014)

Again with a foundational epistemological move that traces the constitutive elements of subject formation in both their material and emotional aspects, labour market inclusion is understood by this transfeminist movement as the construction of a subjectivity and the promise of recognition otherwise denied. The cost of this recognition, however, comes with the intensification of precarization and exploitation, even of the most intimate aspects of life. Just like Marxist feminists reclaimed a salary for housework in order to make the gratuity of care labour visible, transfeminists devised a price list of unpaid gendered emotional labour (Mura et al., 2016),

which included items such as “showing off eccentric queer fashion clothing in order to be crowned PR queen of the city” to “pretend to be a secular nun when in an interview they ask you if you plan to have children” (somMovimentonazioAnale, 2014a). Coherently, to organize the struggle at the point of production and bring conflict in an unmediated way, direct actions in the transfeminist field took up the form of gender strike, queering transnational collective elaborations on striking at times of unpaid and/or precarious labour (Transnational Social Strike Platform, 2018), aiming at interrupting modes of production usually seen as private, insuppressible, individual or immaterial, such as emotional labour and social reproduction.

The refusal of work and interruption of social reproduction has also been central to the mobilization against gender violence promoted by “Non Una Di Meno”. This movement participated in the International Women’s Strike of March 8, 2017,⁶ and, later, through the cooperation of local collectives spread throughout the Italian national territory, produced a national “Feminist plan against male violence against women and against gender violence”. The massive document addresses a number of topics (health, reproductive rights, economic violence, media representation, racism and migration, legislative reform, ecology, feminist pedagogy, life-long learning, spaces for feminist self-defence, anti-violence centre autonomous management, mapping and data collection) and for each provides a theoretical analysis as well as indications for immediate political claims and practical interventions.

The transfeminist epistemology of the plan also emerges clearly in the structural analysis of violence:

It is necessary to expose the violence inherent to the social obligation that dictates to reproduce binary genders only – man/woman – in order to sustain compulsory heterosexuality. This violence, that we define violence of genders, imposes identifying with a universally given masculinity or femininity, namely with the gender assigned at birth, and to conform to the social role programmed for it. By understanding gender and a socially and historically constructed notion, not necessarily linked to biological sex, it is thus possible to make visible the common matrix of that violence that affects,

⁶This mobilization acted in concert to the new wave of global struggles initiated by the Argentinian “Ni Una Menos” movement in 2017 and influenced also by the 2016 strikes and demonstrations by women in Poland protesting against proposed legislation for a ban on abortion.

together, women and all subjectivities that do not conform to such a binary norm. (Non Una Di Meno, 2017, p. 7)

This is a vision of gender-based violence that accounts for both the empirical violence of men against women and for the systemic violence of the gender binary itself.

CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS A GENDER STRIKE

The subjects of transfeminism emerged politically as a coalition of those who inhabit the margins of the gender binary structure, due to their inability or refusal to choose to conform to it. Marxist feminists in the 1970s made the seemingly impossible call to withdraw from participating in the core function of the gender binary structure, by calling for a strike from housework. Contemporary transfeminist scholars called for a strike from another “labour of love”, that is, academic labour. Ultimately, queer transfeminist critiques coalesced around the call for a gender strike, understood as a way to interrupt both the extraction of value resulting from the production of genders (as in the case of feminized work or of diversity management) and the violence inherent to the social obligation to reproduce binary genders. Just as the WFH campaign aimed at denaturalizing care work by demanding a wage for housework as a way to mobilize against compulsory, unpaid housework, the figuration of a gender strike rests on the understanding of the creation of gender itself as work and may promise to liberate our doing of gender from its violent consequences, from its oppressive effects and from the alienation of its value. Doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) in the context of our daily lives is a choice constrained by a binary structure within which we may feel we have little room for autonomy and self-determination, to the point that withdrawing from doing gender may actually seem impossible. However, by adopting a structural analysis of gender, we can argue that the responsibility of doing gender does not bear on the individual but rather on the social structure. It is thus crucial that the transfeminist movement continues to be sustained in its creative elaborations of tactics that will allow it to bring the iconic practice of the gender strike in the public space. Interrupting the production of gender cannot be an individual choice; it needs to be the result of collective choice and an act sustained by a collective mobilization, such as the strike. And if we understand the relationship between social structure and human agency as recursive, we could hope that the

collective choice of striking from gender will bring changes at the structural level and make doing gender less a source of oppression and violence and more that of solidarity and justice, pleasure and creativity.

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