

Thoroughgoing Emancipation' - Interview with the editors of 'Transgender Marxism'

Tuesday 7 December 2021, by [GLEESON Jules Joanne](#), [O'CATHAIL Brian](#), [O'ROURKE Elle](#) (Date first published: 14 June 2021).

In May 2021, Pluto Press published Transgender Marxism, an important attempt to bring together Marxist writings by trans people about trans issues or from trans perspectives. The book's editors Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke answered some questions about the book and their political project for Rupture. Transgender Marxism is available from plutobooks.com.

Brian O'Cathail: Why Transgender Marxism?

Jules Joanne Gleeson: Transgender lives and Marxist theory are already in rowdy dialogue. Our book just offers a newly extended and accessible expression.

Anyone involved in radical organising at this point can hardly have avoided meeting, working, and arguing with trans people. We're disproportionately represented in any tendency worth mentioning, and probably a few that aren't. This shouldn't mystify us too much. Radical theory and political struggle often comes intuitively to those in stigmatised social positions. And both transition and any kind of revolutionary consciousness require picturing much of what gets presented to us as natural or inevitable as actually much more flexible, and up for discussion.

Elle O'Rourke: Trans people occupy an awkward place in social theory and public consciousness, from far-right fantasists dreaming of a surging wave of effeminacy sweeping all in its wake, to the condescending patronage of well-meaning do-gooders. Predatory psychiatrists demonising transgender desires with taxonomies that they would never accept applied to themselves, to sensationalist publishers looking for an enticing cash-grab with lurid tales of gender deviance, indecency and criminality. Phobic Lacanian psycho-analysis casting transition as literally a psychotic desire, to the tenured-yet-tedious queer theorists scrambling to offer a novel articulation of stale and familiar territory. Trans people are frequently ushered onto the stage of theory for a grander purpose than themselves, only to be quickly dismissed in turn. Purpose served. Premises intact.

This is a dispiriting state of affairs. And I think there is a real felt need by many trans people for writing that counters this - that speaks to them and their conditions, that is written by them, and expresses what they know intimately to be true yet is frequently discounted. For many trans people that - quite naturally - means writing in a Marxist register.

Jules: Our aim from the start was to give a wide range of voices that were already developing a formidable array of critical perspectives a more extended and lasting chance to share that with the world.

So finding writers for this sort of collection was actually fairly straightforward – the anthology features outlooks that might otherwise have been heard in activist circles, book clubs, or status updates, zines, throwaway lines, DMs. In these contexts and more, trans people have been developing revolutionary outlooks and insights. But often enough these were published in the most ephemeral possible places (if at all). We wanted to give some of this lively thinking a more lasting form, to be found on bookshelves and libraries into the future.

Brian: You emphasise that you aren't creating a brand new synthesis of Marxism and Transgender theory, but are bringing together theorisations and thought from more scattered and marginal places. Have there been prior attempts to do anything like this?

Elle: When it comes to transgender writing and theory, there is little new under the sun, but there is never a shortage of people claiming the opposite to be the case. A habit of thought that Amy Marvin skewers beautifully in 'The First Trans Poem'. So, we're not here to plant our flag and claim any sort of radical novelty here, rather we stand in a proud lineage of gender radicals and subversives who've paved the way before us. Marx has been read by people of all social positions in the past 200 years and this is no less true of transgender people as well. But if we were to write a more proximate genealogy of the book itself we'd highlight a couple of recent and convergent trends:

The revival of Marx in the wake of the financial crisis – in the popular press this often meant little more than digging into Marx to give weight to banal insights such as 'inequality is bad' or 'economic crisis happen', but there has been an undeniable resurgence in critical and public interest in Marx and his work, among both the public at large and in the academy. And this has been no less true of concerning questions surrounding gender and sexuality. Part of this has been a revival of Marxist-feminism and social reproduction theory, a dusting off of old classics and revisiting old concerns.

- The formalisation and institutionalisation of transgender studies as a field of academic research. The academic study of transgender issues now has a professional, if precarious foothold. Often responding to the silences and exclusions of the canon of Queer Theory or Women and Gender Studies, which has not always been particularly kind to trans people or trans issues. We see the publication of *The Transgender Studies Reader* in 2006, and later the launch of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, which was only founded in 2014. So this proliferation of intellectual interest and theoretical production on transgender issues has not just been confined to Marxism but is part of a broader trend in other fields as well.

- But by far the most important – the rise of an increasingly assertive transgender politics – trans people have carved out a space for themselves in wider society in a way that would have been difficult to imagine just a few short decades ago. Cultural change has been swift, conservative reaction intense.

There's a certain pessimism about these developments that argues that recent acceptance of LGBT people is an always-already recuperated phenomena – that it's limited to discourse, representation, that it serves an overwhelmingly upper-class constituency, that they have de-fanged and domesticated what was previously a vibrant and contentious radical sexual politics. There's a certain amount of truth to these arguments, but I think this is an overly pessimistic view about what we have, collectively, achieved in a fairly short space of time. Moves to recuperate are very much reactive to a social change that precedes it – they are also never entirely successful.

So, the upshot of these convergent trends has been an almost feverish flurry of Queer Marxist theoretical production – an attempt to apprehend in thought these immense social changes. Holly Lewis wrote an important book – *The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory and Marxism at the intersection* – a very thorough 'dressing down' of all 3 traditions oversights in order to put them

into constructive dialogue.

The late Kevin Floyd's *Reification of Desire* brought the tools of Frankfurt school critical theory into contact with Butler and Foucault to analyse the connection between post-war America's labour regimes and the production of masculinities, their subversion, and gay sexual cultures.

The late Christopher Chitty's *Sexual Hegemony* - lovingly edited by Max Fox - charts a history of sexuality through the rise and fall of successive hegemonic centres of capital accumulation within the world-system, and how these networks of trade, intimacy and cross-class and cross-cultural contact gave rise to distinct cultures of same-sex intimacy - to wit, how gay sex was a class issue - a matter of repression or toleration, and why - across distinct societies and at distinct moments in history.

But in terms of an explicit Transgender Marxism, this has found a notable footing in recent years in journals like *Pinko*, *Invert*, *HOMINTERN*. From Joni Aliazh Cohen on transphobia, anti-semitism and value-form theory to Kay Gabriel's suggestive notion of Gender as an Accumulation Strategy, Transgender Marxism has been both theoretically innovative and especially prominent.

Jules: Among cis Marxists, Peter Drucker's *Warped* is probably the most comprehensive attempt at an integration of transgender subject positions in the broader history of sex and political economy.

With regards to critical views of feminism and existing leftism from trans viewpoints, I'd also mention the writing of movement historian Slyvia McSheyne and British revolutionist group Red Fightback's 'Marxism and Transgender Liberation: Confronting Transphobia On The Left', and the ongoing, pseudonymously hosted 'Blood and Terf' podcast. With that said, this is a 300+ page collection, and as such our hope was moving well beyond the embittering travails of leftism. Yes, transphobia is rife within movement spaces (and yes the British "left-leaning" media especially seems to have become something of a transmisogynistic cesspit). But what's more interesting to me is how and why the left has become overrun by transsexualism.

We wanted to provide ideas useful for people locked into struggles against class societies and heterosexual regimes worldwide, today. And a lasting work that the next generation of trans militants could build on.

Brian: You draw a clear distinction between the formal emancipation of trans people and real liberation. Do you think that this is a particularly important distinction in the context of countries like Ireland where "self-ID" is part of the legal framework but trans people remain marginalised?

Jules: Civic breakthroughs shouldn't be dismissed too easily: wins that come in the form of rights loosen the hold potentially hostile bureaucrats have over securing our basic necessities. From cops to landlords, denial of state sanction (especially corresponding documentation of our chosen and official sex) can cause frustration and immiseration as we try to live out our daily lives. We should find hope in recent juridical breakthroughs in India, Pakistan, Germany, Austria and elsewhere affirming the rights for legal X classification (neither M nor F). Even if we want more profound victories yet, we can't overlook the improvements these wins will offer for *hijra*, intersex and non-binary people living in those countries on a daily basis.

But as Ireland and these other relatively progressive states have shown, official recognition of transgender identities doesn't amount to a thoroughgoing emancipation. While Ireland's feminist movement is famously trans integrative, none of the Irish trans people I've met have reported an altogether warm or welcoming experience from wider society, to say the least. Another example of

this point is New York. With the City once famous for its laws against public “crossdressing”, now New York State mandates that self-identification is the last word for everything from legal documents, to public toilets. Nevertheless, intense violence against local black trans women (and a terrifyingly elevated suicide rate for trans people of every demographic) has continued irrespective of these ‘trans rights’ breakthroughs. Black trans New Yorkers have continued to be subject to this violence and worsening poverty, despite the increasing global queer cultural prominence of the longstanding Ball Scene. In the context of capitalist racialisation and ongoing gentrification, a win on paper doesn’t necessarily make life safe or fulfilling. Neither does popular representation on TV and laptop screens.

Contrastingly, in nations often seen by outsiders as beacons of longstanding trans acceptance, such as Thailand, widespread and longstanding acknowledgement of transgender positions doesn’t match up with official recognition. An attempt to correct this stalled in 2019, so today the country attracts healthcare (and sex) tourism on the basis of its famously established trans population, while its state still denies its own citizens a chance to correct their legal name or sex.

This suggests the need for a more rigorous and less easily satisfied movement of trans people, that asserts our needs not towards the end of ultimate amelioration through state recognition, but rather an overturning of our social conditions. In the shorter term, we have to be ready to face down the backlash a more profound social change (or even the threat of it) would surely result in. To work out ways to resist the right’s ‘salami tactics’ that will aim to set trans people against one another, as they already have done with LGB and T. We have to be ready not to limit our concerns, or to settle.

Brian: There’s a strong engagement with Social Reproduction Theory running through a number of the essays in the book. Are you both agreed that this is a particularly fruitful way to approach transgender issues? Or is this something you argue over?

Jules: My published writings on Marxism are mostly part of Social Reproduction Theory, which, as Tithi Bhattacharya puts it, focuses on the ‘life-making’ work preconditional to us having capitalist workforces ready for exploitation. This has been a lively tendency in Marxist-Feminist thought since the 2010s. That decade saw an intensification of gender struggles, from the #MeToo movement against workplace sexual abuse to the worldwide rise of Womens’ Strikes, to work stoppages among “pink collar” workforces in US Red States (chronicled by Kate Doyle Griffiths.) It was easy to see the emergence of trans politics in the form it takes today as one front in that broader struggle against capitalist norms and everyday privation.

My own contribution to the collection (‘How Do Gender Transitions Happen?’) sustains this focus on trans communities as generative of our gender positions as viable (if rupturous) ethical projects. The collection also features Nat Raha’s historical examination of both transgender and lesbian organising against the New Right uses the framework of social reproduction quite masterfully. Noah Zazanis’ essay twins social reproduction quite innovatively with more mainstream psychological work on development (or ‘socialisation’).

Originally, *Transgender Marxism* was conceived as part of Pluto Press’ dedicated Social Reproduction series. But as we compiled the first drafts it became obvious that the material we were dealing with covered a considerably broader scope. These essays cover psychoanalysis (Xandra Metcalfe), phenomenology (Zoe Belinsky) and applied Marxology (Anja Weiser Flower). Perhaps inevitably, this is a work beyond the limit of any one tendency or school within Marxism. We shouldn’t accept a simplified view of trans politics where our concerns are relegated to ‘reproductive labour’: transition can and does impact on not only household management, but more conventionally understood workplace organising (Michelle O’Brien’s contribution seems to make this especially clear). In even well-meaning theorising, there’s always a risk of transgender workers being delimited

to frameworks of “identity” or “ideology” when the reality of capitalist life makes this quite impossible.

In other words, how transgender people make ourselves (and others) fit to join workforces is *one* question relevant to trans life under capitalism. And our collection’s focus is broader than that.

Elle: I’ve been less influenced by the resurgence of Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) than Jules has been. And I think the book bears that out. Not just that it couldn’t capture the full, messy heterogeneity of Transgender Marxist thought, and would have been impoverished if we did try to squish all of our contributors into an ill-fitting SRT box, but also by how it probably can’t. I think SRT is keen to stake a claim for being able to fully understand capitalism in a unitary fashion, with gender-race-class not as distinct but intersecting logics but all bound up together in the reproduction of capital — but I’m unsure if it is entirely successful at that. And I think this is partly because how I have actually read very little SRT that does full justice to transgender people in a way that I can identify with — rather than just including them as an afternote to their thinking.

Brian: “There is no thoroughly anti-capitalist politics that does not include a critique of the household as a social unit of capitalist governance” seems like a key statement connecting a lot of the other arguments in the book?

Elle: The idea that once there was a reliable gender order – where men were men and women were women – but now things are more muddled, more fraught, may seem like a contemporary reactionary concern, a recent source of contention, but in truth, these anxieties have a long lineage. During times of great social stress or great social change, these have been common complaints – with the effeminate trans feminine and the emasculating trans masculine figure standing in as the ur-example of the dawn of a more decadent social age, or – occasionally – a more enlightened gender dispensation.

Why is that? Why is this such a perennial concern for state authorities and conservative forces alike? I think partly because class relations are never as dried out and aloof as more orthodox Marxists would have you believe but, by necessity, implicate theories of gender, race and sexuality.

Elsewhere Angela Mitropoulos has theorised this nexus as a theory of *oikonomia* — ‘the nexus of race, gender, class, sexuality and nation constituted through the premise of the properly productive household’. Material economies implicate sexual economies because theories of sexual reproduction and inter-generational inheritance are also theories of property ownership, wealth and entitlement. *Oikonomia* here operates as a critique of economic discourse and its limits in apprehending social reality – including Marxist attempts that hypostatise capitalist society at the point of production, at the locus of exchange, and in the form of the wage

Under this lens, we can appreciate that gender, race, sexuality and class are not discrete and neatly separable categories. These are not ‘analyses’ for us to pull apart theoretically and then (perhaps) reassemble. They are different means of talking about the same social object. Alternate perspectives on the same question — property, exploitation, social order. And their ‘legitimate’ or ‘illegitimate’ reproduction and conveyance, from one generation to the next.

And I think this analysis is immensely fruitful in allowing us to deconstruct how the household, property law, marriage and so forth — in preventing catastrophic disaccumulation through time and space — play an essential role in sustaining the reproduction of capitalism. And why, those that step outside of its purview, or are forced out, face immense social sanction for doing so.

Jules: What interests me is that anyone would disagree! Households are formidable in their capacity

for naturalising even the most obviously historical contingent circumstances. The message of *Transgender Marxism* is that much of what presents itself as inevitable, fixed or eternal is actually subject to political struggle.

Again, this is hardly a new message: the early feminist and gay liberation movements were rife with critical and even abolitionist writings on the family. Attempts at communal and non-patriarchal forms of life proliferated (even if many failed to last). Gay sci-fi author and unorthodox Marxist Chip Delany's 1979 commune memoir *Heavenly Breakfast: An Essay on the Winter of Love* gives one glimpse of what this looked like from the inside. These perspectives and experiments can't be dismissed as bygone, or vestigial — because families remain the sites of intimate harm for so many of us gender deviants.

The book is filled with critical engagement with families. This wasn't something that we insisted upon from contributors, and instead arose quite obviously how much of our oppression (and especially developmental violence) is visited onto us through private households. While more and more trans people have supportive families, it's still perfectly normal for transition to appear as a rupture between ourselves, and our upbringings. Transgender liberation worth the name can't overlook these moments, or pretend that they're incidental to our aim: social revolution.

Nobody should face down dispossession or physical violence from their relatives, as so many do today. Nobody should be left living with those who discourage them from fulfilling their needs, and dishonour their very name, every waking hour. The daily coercion and conversion therapy that ruins so many childhoods, all that has to be done away with. We need to replace the family relations that capitalism relies on with something more compassionate, humane and reliable.

Brian: There's a rejection of pathologisation in the book and you memorably describe the clinic as 'not only a sinister force, but an absurdity'. This is an opposition to medical frameworks, not to gender reaffirming treatments, right?

Elle:Of course.

Jules: Our problem with the clinics is exactly that gender reaffirmation becomes mediated through a distinctively capitalist division of labour. Patient and clinician (or in the neoliberal idiom, 'customer and service provider'). Providing for our needs becomes one task for trained medical professionals to carry out...A duty they've mostly struggled to complete to our satisfaction.

Elle: Here I would draw a loose and imperfect distinction between care and pathologisation. One is a process of nurture and renewal, a dependence on others that we all experience throughout our lives, or whose absence can harm us greatly. The other is a social process of reproductive administration and control with a distinct, and recent, history. If we examine the records of clinical practise with regards to transgender and intersex people we find a grim history of bureaucratic violence driven by stigmatisation, indifference, medical neglect, hatred, and socially validated sadism and abuse.

Medical knowledge about transgender people has largely always proceeded under the assumption of transgender desires as a social pathology to be corrected. This has often contrasted sharply with the self-understandings arising from transfeminine and transmasculine communities themselves. It was sexologists and psychiatrists who first stumbled towards the idea that transgender people see themselves as being 'born in the wrong body', and that their job was to transform 'men' into 'women' through surgery and hormones. Whereas it was wily transgender patients - keenly aware of what was expected of them if they were to access care at all - who parroted these ideas back to those self-same medical authorities. What's interesting here is that this framing is a recuperation of

the universality of the cisgender subject, of the identity of anatomical configuration with gendered destiny, even as it admits exceptions to it. This is not an innocent move, and it's cultural ubiquity in understanding trans experiences often masks it's actual historical novelty. There's a sense here that transgender identifications are always contingent, awaiting formal validation, whereas 'cisgender' ones are on a more ontologically sure and stable footing.

Jules: Much of the 'absurdity' we talk about comes exactly from so many medical professionals treating trans people as one population among many covered by their Genitourinary or Endocrinological training (and given our heavy stigmatisation, usually not a set of patients they're especially invested in keeping up with, let alone entering into free dialogue with). Most of those offering us treatment are not great gender fulfillment experts, or even interested in our needs at all.

As such the knowledge base deployed by these jobbing medics has become laughably lacking when compared to the community resources regularly updated by those who are personally navigating their healthcare needs during transition. Needless to say, trans people are prone to talking to each other! We've long shared practical insights and precise empirical details, as we pursue our healthcare needs. As transition cuts across class divides, those informally researching the topic includes registered nurses, biomedical lab workers, and longtime autodidacts who've been binge reading Pubmed abstracts since their teens. In other words, trans communities have refused the passivity expected of us by the medical trade and developed our own best practices. The norms of these communities vary wildly (some are even more positivistic than the average MD rejecting "clinical data" as hearsay, while others are more prone to freewheeling experimentation), but between them, a detailed set of resources from 'how to' memes to safe medic directories have arisen across the past twenty years. Community research and distribution has come to closely inform the work of the scant few medical professionals who show a dedicated interest in collaborating with their patients.

By contrast, the majority of medical professionals peddle blatantly outdated and sometimes dangerous "best practices" that were controversial and speculative even when put together several decades ago. I've known trans people prescribed multiple anti-androgens, an intersex trans man given hormonal advice so shoddy they were hospitalised in a life threatening emergency. One activist reported being denied an estrogen refill by the NHS despite having had Sex Reassignment Surgery more than a decade before. I could continue with these horror stories until I filled this interview's page count.

Medicalisation is harshest the further trans people stray from the assumptions of 'born in the wrong body', including of course gender positions suppressed by colonial regimes. In nations with clinic systems especially, non-binary people are regularly advised by the community simply to keep their exact gender position quiet from medics. And those who do come forward are discouraged from anything beyond the 'two regimes fit all' model. This is a striking contrast to the reality outside the clinic, where femboys, T-microdosers and more have proliferated. Currently, these gender positions are a *terra incognita* for the officials of medical science, while quite familiar to any trans person with a smartphone.

Elle: So this is a dispute about reproductive knowledge, the body and it's social signification, but it's also one with enormous material consequences. Doctors can deny you a prescription, ameliorative therapies or affirmative surgeries based on personal prejudice. Insurance companies can do the same. At the centre of this has been the pathologising assumptions about trans people's healthcare needs, their wants and desires. There's a certain liberal argument that leans on the authority of medical science, sexology, psychoanalysis and psychiatry, to make its claims that trans people are deserving of certain rights and social esteem - an authority that religious reactionaries are blithely dismissing and so forth - this can make a certain amount of tactical sense in some contexts, but it

also sidesteps the thornier issue of power, class and authority – and those institutions role in suffocating trans flourishing at every turn. A doctor holds immense power over you and your wellbeing, and this is felt most sharply by those on the receiving end of it's cruelest abuses. This is not unique to trans people – we all need care at some point in our lives, no one's needs are ever the same – but the idea that these needs must be framed as pathological in order to be seen as worthy of having resources dedicated towards them – that is something we are keen to reject sharply.

Jules: In 2019 I wrote a polemic about this with one of our collection's contributors JN Hoad for Salvage Mag, **Gender Identity Communism**. Written under the working title 'Abolish The Clinic', we explore the plight of British trans people from our state healthcare provider, the Gender Identity Clinic (speaking personally for a moment: this was a major factor in my leaving that backwards island eight years ago). We make the case for the further elaboration of 'DIY HRT' into a replacement for the capitalist state's clinicalisation, since the GIC system seems clearly beyond reformation. We'd be delighted to read an Irish response!

Brian: You point out that right-wing rhetoric places the transitioner and the migrant alongside each other as key symptoms and agents of 'cultural degeneracy'. Can you expand on this?

Jules: Right-wing movements have consistently excelled where leftists have struggled to combine various social concerns into a single platform with reach and ideological potency. Towards this end, both trans people and migrants have served as foils (or folk devils) for their vision of stable states, brutal law enforcement, and hierarchical households.

(The purest example of this overall perspective winning out both electorally and institutionally is currently found in Hungary, which until recently seemed to be approaching a one-party state under Fidesz.)

From this view, both trans people — referred to in terms of 'social contagion' or confusion generated by 'gender ideology' — and mass migration — referred to as 'waves' of destructive tides — are presented as upsetting the natural cohesion required for lasting states, and harmonious societies.

What these twinned folk devils share is our representation as at once symptomatic of national decline, and our depiction as malign *agents* of chaos and unchecked change. Marxists have long 'leaned in' to the stereotype of foreign subversives, agitating always from the outside. We are the 'internationalist left' both by circumstance, and vocation. *Transgender Marxism* doubles down on this reclamation.

Elle: I think this also touches upon what I was saying about *oikonomia* earlier – so let me elaborate on that.

Ethnonationalist politics are always simultaneously patriarchal, familial and racial. Making claims about what a good and orderly world looks like, demarcating who is entitled to what and what is expected of them in return, and endeavouring to bring it about. But they do not just emerge *ex nihilo*. They rely on social scripts, codes, laws and norms already accepted by wider society. On expectations that are fundamental to how capitalist society reproduces itself. Here, contingent social forms become naturalised necessities.

This is readily apparent in the animus directed towards outcasts and deviants. We see this in far-right propaganda directed at trans women – essentially disgusted that anyone would transgress the bounds of the supposedly fixed biological designation of 'sex', and demonising certain trans women in particular for failing to live up to an idealised performance of femininity...While at the same time,

trying to guarantee changes in the law that make gender transition as legally adverse and difficult as possible. Men are men, women are women, and there you shall remain.

But we also see this in racist far-right propaganda. It seems not entirely coincidental that jokes or fears about 'miscegenation' - the fear of racially transgressive sexuality - has come into currency in the same circles, at the same time. Think of Cheryl Harris' important essay 'Whiteness as Property' - examining how race as a legal regime is codified in law, how property as a legal form is inextricably racialised - and how conceptions of race as both a cultural or biological construct are always claims about property inheritance, too.

Impositions of gendered expectations and racial discrimination are also claims about where the acceptable threshold of exploitation ought to lie, and on what terms. Whether your labour is waged or unwaged, whether it is compensated well or poorly, even the type of work you do - or do not - is contingent on your ability to embody a socially plausible form of masculinity or femininity - within boundaries set by what society understands your racial background to be.

So political anxiety about the breakdown of these thresholds of exploitation - that they are increasingly difficult to verify, or are being directly challenged, or are not being enforced hard enough, is a particular concern - all moral-economic parables of sound money, productive capital, productive bodies, and the (re)productive heterosexual family unit necessitate unrelenting disciplinary violence directed towards 'irrational' speculation, unproductive capital, unproductive consumption, and unproductive desires. Social distinctions, for capital, are not just greeted indifferently - and they never have been. Instead, they are integrated into the churning maw of accumulation, serving at once as a material force.

Brian: In your essay, Jules, you mention the way in which trans writers are constantly pushed to justify their existence and account for their deviance from cisgender norms. Does this kind of thing start to grind writers and thinkers down with endless repetition?

Jules: While this grind does exist, I should end on a hopeful note: it's one that more and more of us are finding ways to wriggle free from. I think a defining difference between the most popular trans thinking of the later '00s (I'm thinking especially here of Julia Serano's *Whipping Girl*, which identified this 'etiological imperative' as a problem, without doing much to actually escape it) and the present is that so many trans thinkers have shrugged off the pressure to write in two interlocking forms: 1) confessional accounts and 2) apologia.

That these two modes used to predominate was understandable enough in a hostile climate, with such limited opportunities for anyone hoping to see their work published by a major (or even minor) press. But lately, a whole lot has changed. Our editor at Pluto Press, David Schulman, actually discouraged our original plan for *Transgender Marxism* to include a dedicated section of confessional accounts. As it stands, confessional writing appears directly in service of theory, without arbitrary distinction (Farah Thompson, Nathaniel Dickson and JN Hoard's contributions all use personal experience in strikingly differing ways).

To me it seems clear that this greatly expanded scope for trans writing matches our movement's successes. You can see this with a glance over some recent publications. Andrea Abi-Karam and Kay Gabriel's collection of trans revolutionary poetics *We Want It All*, Sybil Lamb's sprawling illustrated fantasies, Mika's genre disintegrating *NO TIGER*, the aesthetics reviews by Emily Zhou, Emily Wollenhorst and many others found in e-flux #117's transfem special, Cara Esten and Lo Ferris' utopian-melancholic *New Session* collection (published via telnet), or the uncompromising yet commercially released poplit of Torrey Peters and Casey Plett all attest to the much broader horizons for trans people won by political breakthrough across the early 21st century. At this point,

genre and formal boundaries seem no more able to contain us than our assigned sexes. Today trans writers can clearly see print doing much more than explaining why we're allowed to exist, indeed it's hard to think of a mode of writing we haven't been printed turning our hands to.

With that said, it's often hard to escape the orbit of those most hostile to us. There is no shortage of transphobic voices out there, and many British feminist establishment figures especially seem to do little else with their day besides reciting anti-trans talking points. This constant chant has been hard to overlook for many committed to trans liberation, and taken its toll through attrition. There are any number of our brightest minds compulsively burrowed into the cycle of hate reading transphobic material, circulating screeds and novel slurs that would otherwise be confined to the deepest of online sewers, and attempting immanent critiques of those intent on driving us out of public life. For some years I was well known among my friends for my refusal to flinch from this kind of material, in an especially masochistic display of morbid curiosity.

But ultimately, this kind of habit is a self-perpetuating dead end: we have a world to win, and rote repetitions of the basics are best left to paid NGO professionals and their painstakingly precise PowerPoint presentations. Bringing about a revolution needs more than activists. Our movement can't concern itself too much with those who want to chase us from public life. Let's talk to the people who are still listening.

P.S.

• Rupture. June 14, 2021:

<https://rupture.ie/articles/thoroughgoing-emancipation?fbclid=IwAR3sNqE4yDTeW2BBlysH6KYsjjJoUzADpsT8BwcrR5n4CJR-ZJvnhk8yNeE>

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