

Radical Transfeminist Activism

Speakers: Chryssy Hunter (CH); Morgan Page (MP); Mijke van der Drift (MD).

In May 2019 SWARM hosted a three day festival involving panel discussions across a wide range of topics that impact on sex workers, and that connect and intersect with sex worker rights organising and broader struggles for justice.

This recording is from that festival.

00:00:00 CH It's a quote slightly adapted from the introduction to The Radical Transfeminist Zine, which you may have seen, published in 2017: "We are dreaming, and have been dreaming for decades, of radical social transformation rooted in Black radicalism, anarcho-communism, gay liberationist and other collectivist politics. We've necessarily been working towards alternatives to capitalism, and practicing them on a micro level, when we could steal the hours to do so. Our feminism has emerged through the experiences of our lives, transgressing gender norms which are always racialized, classed, and abled. Through challenging the gender identity police 00:00:43, psychiatrists and psychologists, and the bourgeois politics of trans and queer liberalisms, through imbibing feminist writing and the writings of women and men of colour, of queer and trans writers, and pulling a transfeminist herstory out of obscurity." And that's from [inaudible 00:01:04], 2017. I'm not going to talk too much more about this, but I wanted to just make the point that, on a very superficial level, we have the common enemies of SWERFs and TERFs, but I think that that's not the target; that's not our target. The issues that they throw up, issues that go above the fundamental critique that we want to achieve. And for trans people in particular, access to being legitimized legally is less important and perhaps the decriminalization of sex work is less important than being given the space, the freedom to have the time to critique and fight against capitalism, against racism, against colonialism, and that's where the heart of radical transfeminist politics lies. So I think now I'm going to pass on to Morgan.

00:02:04 MP Hello. Just before I start I do want to point out that unfortunately one of our panellists couldn't be here today. Chamindra had some scheduling difficulties so unfortunately isn't here, and unfortunately that also means that our discussion is going to be a bit different, both because we lose a really important voice and because now we unintentionally have an all-white panel, which is a big problem when talking about radical transfeminism. That said, I'm Morgan M. Page and I identify as Canadian. [Audience chuckles] And I am an activist from Canada who has been doing work around transfeminism, sex work, and HIV for the better part of fifteen years at this point. And I think to kind of launch us into the discussion of transfeminism I'll talk a little bit about why that is. I am a person with a person in a background in lots of things that I don't necessarily want to talk about on a recorded panel. But through a lot of that stuff, I came into working with organizations like Walk a Mile, a sex worker led organization in Canada, and later I became an activist through a moment that I have called "The Battle for Homewood," which is the trans sex work stroll in downtown Toronto that is in the heart of the gay village. In 2009 I got a text message from a friend—it was like one of those T9 situations—saying that a group of homeowners were attacking street-based sex workers on the stroll and would I come down to a counter-protest. And I was like, sure, I guess. I had been working all day and I was really tired and I didn't really want to be caught up in anything. But I went down and I ended up becoming one of the lead organizers on six weeks of nightly counterprotests from eleven PM to four AM in which we physically put our bodies in between violent homeowners who were trying to assault sex workers and drive them from the area and the mostly indigenous, marginally-housed street-based sex workers who use Homewood as their workplace. And this experience really radicalized me in a lot of ways, both in terms of making me really involved in trans activism more broadly but especially making me delve into my own background through sex work and linking these two things up. In Canada we have a really interesting situation which is that our trans activism has always been led by sex workers. It has been from the jump. Basically the original trans services in Canada were all started by my dear friend and mentor Mira Salay Ross 00:05:44 who is a Métis, which is one of the three main groups of indigenous people in Canada, a Québécois trans sex worker who, as she says, when she came out onto the stroll in Montréal was known as "the bitch with the big nose" and when she moved to Toronto was known as "the French bitch with the big nose." And she is really my idol in so many ways, but made sure that the trans activism that happened in Canada always went back to the street; it always started from the most marginalized people, with sex workers, racialized people, and people living with HIV as the

main focuses. And that means that the conversations that we have around trans issues in Canada is really different than the conversation that we have here in the UK. I've actually been mildly horrified to get involved with trans activism here in the UK, which has been—to put it lightly—a bit different. Where the conversation is so frequently dominated by white, middle class and upper middle class voices who are trying really hard to distance themselves from anything that's not respectable. It seems like the main strategy that's been here for at least the past little while has been to try and show, "We're just like you." Whereas in Canada our whole thing is, "We have problems that need fixing and it's all your fault, [Audience and panel laugh] so you need to do something about it." And trying to bridge these two things has been a struggle. I feel like even in the conversations I have here with other trans people in the UK who aren't sex workers, there's a reticence in talking about them, particularly publicly. And I think not all of that is our own internal fault; I think part of that is due to an extremely toxic media culture that exists here, that does not exist in North America. Something that I myself was subject to. You may have seen around Christmas time a horrible story in the Sunday Times that said: "Trans charity gives five hundred thousand pounds to ex-stripper to influence public opinion" with a picture of me when I had short hair—I was really cute then. [laughs] And the funny thing is, I haven't been a stripper, ever. So I don't know where they got that from. But I think a lot of people here, rightfully so, are really worried about being subject to that kind of scrutiny and violence on a public level and as a result, the responses we give in public tend to be very respectable and undermine I think many of the things that those of us who identify with a more radical transfeminism would like to achieve. Particularly around making links around sex work and drug use and HIV. So I think that's what I'll say first to begin with. We can dive in more later.

00:09:19 MD Hi. So much experience. Yeah. I don't know if I have, yet again, my experiences to offer on a panel. [laughs] I'm a bit busy with other things. I'm busy with making stories at the moment. And I think it's my thing at the moment, so I'm just going to talk about a few stories, about a few ways of thinking that I find actually—that I think maybe is what I have to offer, that is maybe otherwise—there will be zines. I will bring tomorrow the zines. I was not home tonight so I couldn't pick up the zines. And it's a new zine, the Radical Transfeminism Zine, the old one, maybe some of you know it, but we just brought out a Radical Transfeminism mini zine. And it's about trans reproduction, trans social reproduction. And I wrote something in it, it's a bit of an old story of mine, but come on, it could be written 00:10:13. I was really inspired because yesterday I saw Robin Kelly speak,

and I think it was one of the last heroes, historians just like you. And this man was amazing. It's just like, if there's people that—if there's prophets, prophets tell you who you are, there's also beacons. And beacons tell you where you are. And I think Robin Kelly is a beacon. He just tells you, "This is where you are" and then it also shows you what way you can go. I was very inspired. And he talked about the international and pessimism and solidarity, so I'm not going to copy his speech obviously, but I was quite influenced by it. So firstly I wanted to talk—there's a lot of talk about community and by now, I have nothing to do with community anymore. Partly because I'm overworked. I'm travelling too much. Also I try to read a lot. So I basically just don't see people any more except for a few friends, which is fine. So I don't do community and also like—if you're thinking about the trans community like who are these people? Half of them are indeed people who I have not so much in common with and also, but more the problem is they want to go in a direction that I don't want to go in to. Because I don't think it's a very helpful direction. And also then, if we think about, are we then a community because we're trans and I think like why are we a community? Because we share an identity. But what is an identity then based on? An identity is traditionally based on the idea of a receiving of certain social pressures. So basically you are a community because certain other people hate you. And I'm like, that's not enough. It's not enough. Because what we see with communities is that they always fall apart. Just because we receive the same social pressures doesn't mean we like each other or want to sit in the same room as each other, right? So I leave that a bit—maybe not so much community but I would like to sort of think about collectivity a bit. And with collectivity comes of course a form of solidarity. And what is solidarity? Because sometimes solidarity is a form of exchange, right? You do something, and then other people have to do something back for you. So solidarity always seems to be for somebody else, but I think that is a way of thinking about solidarity that is very much based in this community idea, right? Because you are a you, you are solidarity with an Other. But I think solidarity—we can also think about it in terms of wider patterns. Solidarity is working for a collective and total liberation. That's the only form that is actually solidarity that is more or less relevant. And that means that also, if you're going to work for collective liberation, it's a form of agency and a form of doing things that you put in a certain direction. That's why we need the beacons to tell us where we are and where we maybe could go. Also then, you need to think where you personally are and then it's easier to embrace differences instead of saying, like, "Ah, we're a community because we can hang on to that word, 'trans,' like we're in the underground." And then suddenly we found out that communities always want to fall apart and instead of falling apart we can find out oh, we

are actually in different spaces. And we try different things, this is why we need to learn from each other and not already assume that we are together, that we are in unity, because we're not. So then let's talk a bit about "trans." What is this whole "trans" then? Well I think "trans"—the one thing that "trans" does—this is of course why I think about identity in that way, is it undoes categories. It says, "I am not this." And then we don't know where we go—at least I don't. And "trans" does something else. Because I think "trans" has something slightly special that I actually quite like about it. Because normally if you hear talk about gender and things, it's always this like oh, it's a bit oppressive, right? Gender? But I think trans is one of the few groups that says like, there's joy in gender! You can totally embrace it, you can just do something else with the gender thing, right? So there's a way out, I think, and this is the fun of trans. So if on the one hand we have that undoing the categories, undoing the categories of oppression, undoing the category that pulls you into a certain identity that you might not want to have. You can use your joy of escape, as a way out, and the joy of escape is then also the fighting, then, for total liberation. And now what is that 'feminism'? Feminism reminds us of the certain pressures that there are, right? A radical feminism says then, we don't stick to just those pressures; we rebuild it. We break it open. So radical is then done, the no inclusion 00:14:54, but liberation—because I think, the no inclusion is kind of a tricky one especially if we're talking about sex workers and sex workers rights because that's the only important thing. There's a difference between liberty and liberation, right? And this is kind of an important difference, and I think it's an important difference to embrace. Because liberty means civil rights. No one will ever be free if you have civil rights, right? But these rights are also important because without rights it is worse, right. So while it is cool to say we don't want rights, we also know if we don't have the rights, it's going to be harder and that means you have more identity maybe but it's maybe not what you always want. So what are rights, then? I think rights is a curbing of the power of the managerial class on their own terms. So if you see rights as this, it is talking to the managerial classes on their terms, you also know that rights will never set you free, right? Because you have to speak in the language of management to the managers. That means that you—I think in the UK there is indeed sometimes confusion, that people think that rights are freedom. Because I think in other papers 00:16:15, like in 2015 when we organized this radical transfeminism conference. I called this like—a lot of trans people feel a sort of fall from grace. They were in the norm and suddenly oh! They fall out of the norm and it's all so bad outside of it. And the only thing they want is to really go back into that norm. It's a very

sad thing to see. But it's all around. So I think now basically I have said everything that I coherently wanted to say, so I'll just pass it back to Chryssy. Bye!

00:16:54 MP I really connect with what you're saying in terms of rights not necessarily being freedoms. And a lot of the work that I've done and been part of communities that have been doing in Canada, and a little bit here as well, is around unpacking that notion because often trans communities—in Canada for example, we've been trying really hard to get our Human Rights Code to expand to include gender identity and gender expression. Which, on the surface of it, sure sounds like a great plan. And a lot of people who aren't affected by other issues will think—or people who have that kind of fall from grace experience, which not all of us have because some of us were down on the floor to begin with, but a lot of people are like, "Oh! This is it! This is going to solve the thing, then I'll be able to get a normal job that I would have gotten working at a bank at like a high salary and I can just go live my normal everyday life." And that's great or whatever, but it's not really going to solve the vast majority of the problems, right? So a lot of the work that myself and the communities I've been involved with have been focusing on is reframing that conversation around that still won't change that there's going to be trans sex workers and they're going to be criminalized, and it's still not going to that change migrants—Like we can put in a gender recognition act process that's better than the one currently, but that's still not going to be open to migrants and non-binary people. Like we have to actually look at what are the practical issues that people are experiencing and deal with that. A human rights-based blanket approach does essentially nothing, except add some nice words to paper. Because in theory what can you use a human right for? You can sue someone, except if you're poor or you're a migrant with uncertain immigration status, how are you going to sue anybody? Like what are you going to do? Can you take it to human rights tribunal? Do you have the time and the money and the support and the energy to carry through a whole human rights process that could take years? Most people don't have that. I don't have that! And I have like an everyday, you know, non-sex-work-y job these days. I don't have that energy; I'm exhausted. So I think that's a really important point for what I think radical transfeminism should be about, which is looking at material conditions, rather than identity. We have to look at what are the material conditions in people's lives.

00:19:43 CH Yeah I think that this is really important. If we think about the issues in these terms, taking the onus away from us and our agency. If we have something that seems quite

banal, like we've gone through in the UK, revisiting the gender recognition act. Something that's very—that I think a lot of us didn't pay that much attention to when it was suggested, because it didn't seem to impact very much in terms of radical transfeminism. But has been weaponized and jumped on by people with views and with politics anti-trans. Then we have to react in some way. So we have had react in some way, because there effecting the views of people who don't know very much about trans issues and this isn't helpful. This is creating an environment where we're being more and more open to attack, where the number of rights we have are being attacked culturally but actually as well. So in terms of this kind of concrete, low level politics, what should our strategies be?

00:21:06 MD I want to react a bit to the material conditions. Yes, but not only, of course, right? Because if you only look at the material conditions—and I really learned this from a writer like Ghassan Kanafani, the Palestinian writer. He wrote two books that I really learned a lot from. The first book is *Men in the Sun*. And he writes about material conditions of the Palestinian people in exile, right? And they cannot do nothing. Because constantly no matter what they try to do, they are blocked at every moment. So they cannot go anywhere. And it is a very—a book leading to a kind of despair, because conditions are so bad that you sink in, and that's all there is, right? And the terms of your struggle are set by the oppression that you face. But then he wrote a second book, like a while later, this book in between. But the second book is *Returning to Haifa*. And what you see there is the verb—it came back in the title, right? So from the despair of the material conditions, a sort of activity came in there. And what he does in that book, he says—he talks actually there of the undoing of the category. So I think then, if for a struggle and knowing where we want to go, I always think it's sort of three parts material, but it's one part—so it becomes a form, right? It's a kind of pyramid—one part is immaterial. One part is the imagination, and thinking, "This is where we need to go. This is where we would like to go from where we are now." And that will always change, right? That's why speculative fiction is also so important. To think what kind of other future can we live, because the means, the means of our actions determine the ends where we go. So we need to pull the future into the present and really try to live that future that we want to live, because otherwise we get stuck in despair I think.

00:23:02 MP I think it is easy to fall into a trap of despair when looking at, for example, statistics on the material conditions of a lot of trans people, particularly the most marginalized. However, I also feel like there's a galvanizing force there, because we can

break down what are the actual things we're experiencing and look at ways we can address them. And sex work is the perfect example. There's so many trans people who are involved in sex work, and even those of us who are not involved may be affected by sex work through you know, the issue—do people know what walking while trans is, here? So a lot of trans people, regardless of whether or not we're sex workers, if we're walking on the street, particularly if we're racialized, will be stopped by police. And treated as though we are sex workers, sometimes even arrested and charged with solicitation, even if we are fully, have never done sex work, ever. Just because we're visibly gender non-conforming and police tend to—especially for racialized, gender non-conforming people—assume that that means that we're automatically a sex worker, right? So I feel like when we break down the material conditions and we look at sex work, we can see that there is a way to change that. Through decriminalization, we can then stop a lot of these issues that are affecting, not all trans sex workers and not all people assumed to be trans sex workers, but definitely a wide proportion of people. So I feel like, for me, focusing in on material conditions rather than being a sort of depressive, sort of, “Oh god, our lives are so horrible! We're never going to be able to deal with this!”—it just makes it a bit more bite-sized and deal-able, because we can come up with solutions to meet those things. Whereas if we just say: “The state of being trans is bad and if only we had human rights, that would change everything.” It's such a huge mountain, like how do you climb that mountain, you know?

00:25:23 CH Which comes back to the discussion we were having in the first panel about how do you effect people's opinions who have no knowledge of this, who have no experience and live outside of this? Which again refers back to the question that I just suggested, of how do we try to incrementally, effectively effect people into the space that we want them to be thinking in?

00:25:51 MD I guess... the joy of gender! [laughs]

00:25:54 CH The joy of gender. Ah, that's lovely. Well... yeah.

00:26:02 MP I think the only way to do that is to build a coalitional politics, where—and we can see this starting to happen, actually. I was talking about, in the first panel, around reproductive justice right now. And looking at the ways that trans people are not an addition to reproductive justice, but we have always already been there, right? Particularly, obviously

for trans masculine, non-binary spectrum folks, but also for all trans people who are effected by sterilization laws in regards to getting gender recognition. So in a lot of countries you can't legally change your gender unless you're sterilized, which was—it's really interesting to see this emerge as a politic because these laws are originally put into place under the assumption that all trans people would be wanting to have what was known as a "sex change." And obviously that's not true, and not really where we're at these days. And so it's really changed over time.

00:27:18 MD Can I respond to that? Because I was from one of those countries where this law was in place and they did it to me. This is what the zine is about, by the way, so you can just totally gorge on its stories, it's really lovely. I think it's also just eugenics. Because we're in Europe, and Europe is eugenics. I mean, you can't—just whatever way you cut the pie so you're going to get it there. It's also like culling people out of the species, right? The degenerates. And I think it's just like European politics, and they have been doing that all the time. And will always do, unless there's total liberation. Hey, do you have questions, because we are just happily chatting. Morgan, can I ask you one question? If there is a right, you would be one to get tomorrow, which right would it be? Now I'm kind of curious, because the materiality and the right [off mic] because the right is a sort of imagination, right?

00:28:07 MP I mean there's so many different issues. I do think fundamentally decrim is probably, and this might sound shocking, the easiest for us to win right now. Because abolishing borders? Real tough. That's going to be, that's a century-long project right there. Took a century to put them up, it's going to take us a century to take them down. But decrim is something where I feel like there is growing traction, politically. I don't know if you're seeing, out of the United States of all places, now all of these presidential front-runners are coming out to talk about like, "Oh we stand with sex workers!" Like, Kamala Harris, who criminalized sex workers for her whole career is now like, "I stan decrim, I'm here for it, vote for me!" I never thought that would happen in my lifetime, that that would be a presidential issue in America. And in Canada is something that, you know, an organization that I work for, Maggie's, is quite heavily involved in gaining however briefly full decriminalization in Canada. And is still involved in the process of now dismantling some unfortunate backlash legislation that was put into effect. I think that is a winnable issue. And I think that is a winnable issue that would have a huge impact on the most marginalized parts of the trans community. I also think another right that's another winnable issue is around drug users

rights. So again, not to use Canada as an example, but we just legalized marijuana there. And I have many criticisms of legalization as a strategy at any point, but I feel like that is another thing where the public perception is changing such to the point where we could easily, if we—or maybe not so easily, but we could win that situation. So those are two material conditions that I think are winnable.

00:30:25 CH I meant to pass it back to you, Mijke?

00:30:28 MD For the same things. Yeah—oops, oops. Yeah, for drugs, yeah. I grew up in the Netherlands, so we've been flooded with drugs for forever. And it was also marijuana has been allowed for forever, so yeah. It was a great way to get paranoid when I was sixteen [laughs]. We loved it. Yeah, what would I—yeah the border issue is, I think is major. The breaking down of prisons, every single prison needs to be broken down right? And in that sense I think what I would—because I can't answer the rights situation. I think rights, yeah. I don't know. I would really—especially also in feminist circles, a more sustained thinking about what transformative justice would look like would be really, really good. Because I feel like from a lot of feminism there is a kneejerk punishment reaction still going. And it is very difficult, it's very difficult to think through it. And I would, I think also—collectivity, not a community, as a collectivity of all kinds of marginalized groups to think what transformative justice would look like even in our communities and how it can get off the ground, I would really love that conversation. I think it would be stellar if we had it.

00:31:56 CH Transformative justice, just to talk about that. And the abolition of prisons. If we talk about just this in general, then we need an entirely different approach, which of course infects—infects, affects that the way we think about politics as well. If we have a move away from carceral feminism, which is toxic and unhelpful in our terms, in terms of the kinds of reactions that we need, and think about how we can build deeper, more searching answers to oppression, discrimination, et cetera. So I think that that's an absolute key part of what I think radical transfeminism is about. In terms of acknowledging if you have an anti-carceral feminism, acknowledging who's in prison, and how it racializes people, how it effects poor people, how it effects trans and people—LGB people. And just, is the most fundamental issue that highlights the unfairness of society in general. So I think that's—we should absolutely embed that deeply in our politics. Yeah. Have we questions now?

00:33:20 Q1 Excellent panel so far by the way. I'm very much enjoying the discussion. I want to talk a little bit, or sort of ask in regards to like this sort of incrementalism thing that you've touched on, is these slow, tiny, miniscule, almost—I don't want to say meaningless—sort of changes that a lot of people sort of engage with in a way that means well, like, "Oh, we've got a third gender box that you can tick!" And all those sorts of things that people are meaning well, obviously, whenever they're sort of engaging in those things. But they're not particularly useful in enacting lasting, meaningful change for the community as a whole. How do we as a community engage with incrementalism whenever we're trying to get really quite radical things to happen? Or, if we should even engage with those sorts of things at all. I'd like to hear your thoughts.

00:34:17 CH So would—yeah, in terms of the discourse of the transgender tipping point, it seems that we've achieved certain things but actually underneath all of that there's nothing's really changed. This kind of thing, I think. Somebody want to take it, yeah?

00:34:32 MP Yeah. I think my approach is to think about things as from like a prison abolitionist and a harm reduction standpoint. So I'm always thinking: how can I make things better right now, but also how can I keep in mind my long term goal? So with prisons, for example, I think about: how can I make things better right now for people in prison, without expanding the prison system, right? And I think that can be applied to everything. Like the conversation in the earlier panel about diversion programs, which I'm personally not a huge fan of. But I think that's a really interesting example where we can provide alternate routes that maybe don't fundamentally change the system that we have right now, but without expanding the power of that system. And if anything, trying to contain the negative effects. So having a third gender option is maybe not our ultimate goal. Maybe our goal is having like no gender on passports, like why do we need one? However, in the interim, it may make things better for a particular group of people who feel like they need that recognition, right? So as long as—I just think as long as we're not expanding a negative system, and we're doing what we can to kind of contain and chip away at that system, we can also just come up with practical interim fixes. But it's about keeping that long term vision, sort of as you're talking about before. It has to all be towards the goal, however you want to define that goal.

00:36:31 MD Yeah I think it's a good and interesting question because I think—at least the generation above me, maybe not the generation above you, maybe it's two generations

above some of you—there was a lot of people going from the working class to the middle class right? And as soon as they then reached the middle class decided to betray the working classes. I think we just saw that, at least the generation of my parents at least. So I think there's a huge problem. But it's also a problem to say like, "Ah no, keep the pressure up mate." [laughs] It's like it's also not what we want, right? Because we need to actually make lives better, especially the harder lives need to just be made better—sometimes I think not every life needs to be made better on the terms that people like the people that are quote "fallen from grace"—that have recently been kicked out of the norm. I don't know. I don't—I don't always think we need to fight for that, actually. Because it is sometimes more important that they do the work of undoing the values that they brought with them when they got kicked out of the norm. I think that's more important. So sometimes incrementalism comes by refusing to make a situation just a little bit better, so it's survivable for some people. Survivable—most people that are above survival level. It's a bit of difficult one. But I hope you see where I am, and yeah. What I've tried to think.

00:38:04 CH I think it's a very interesting question. Because I think it's not just about what we're trying to achieve. As I said a few minutes ago, it's what we're trying to fight against. And it's how other people weaponize this kind of politics. If someone is trying to improve something slightly, and that's jumped on as a way of pushing everything back, then I think we need to very much bear that in mind as well. That it's quite—having the power to keep hold of the long term goals that are wide and deep, at the same time having to do sometimes some politics that you don't really want to do, I think is an unfortunate byproduct of sitting where we sit.

00:38:48 MD And also I think, vis a vis oppression, modesty is not a virtue.

00:38:58 Q2 Hi, thank you so much. This is really interesting. I would love you to talk about trans masc identifying folks within the context of this wonderful conversation. I don't have a specific question.

00:39:20 MP As a self-described expert on trans masculine people [Audience laughs], I think—one of the interesting things about the rise of trans feminism as a genre, which kind of has its roots in the 90s but really came into its own in the 2000s, was that a lot of what was happening in the 2000s was a reaction to kind of an explosion of trans masc culture. You

had the kind of—Original Plumbing magazine 00:39:55, it was very cool to be a trans man in the 2000s. There was like this trans masculine porn explosion; like, everyone was really into it. And trans women were sitting at the side lines being like, “We’re not invited to any of the parties. When we turn up to the parties, no one wants us there. People won’t even talk to us.” Like it was really shitty. It was bad. And for the first several years of us getting like woke to trans feminism, some of us were very like anti-trans men as a result. Were like, trans men are oppressive, they’re part of the patriarchy, plus they’re all buddy-buddy with like other aspects of the LGBT community that don’t want to deal with trans women and blah blah blah. And it created this kind of weird Tumblr antagonism that I’m sure we’re all aware of, we’ve all seen a badle 00:40:46 on the internet. And I think that came from some very genuine hurt, but unfortunately has burned a lot of bridges. I think what is happening right now is kind of a coming together again, which is really important because I think there is such a profound history and present of trans masculine and non-binary activism from that side of the spectrum. Particularly around reproductive justice and also around sex workers’ rights. Like, I don’t know if y’all have ever clocked this, but like trans men have always been in and around sex worker communities, both as workers, as lovers, as friends, as supports, as bodyguards, as drivers. Like it’s such a well-established link. And I feel like acknowledging that work is really important and building bridges with that work is really, really, really important. So that’s what I would say. I think things got really badle-y and toxic for a minute in the Tumblr years, and now we’re all calming down, and everything’s better. Well, not everything, but.

00:42:10 MD Yeah. I agree a lot. I think when I came—when I finally became totally sort of public, as trans femme, I think a lot of the trans women I met were very, very normative. And I just came out of squatting and activism and what have you, and I just met a group of people that was really judgmental and normative, and I didn’t fit in. So I basically, in the 2000s even, in those years, I came of age amongst trans guys and trans mascs, and that was very healthy for me. Basically because a lot of them came out of feminism, especially people I knew. So it was way more logical for me to hang out with them than with trans women that I had nothing in common with, because they were basically judgmental bitches. [Audience laughs]

00:43:09 CH And I think we can also kind of talk about intergenerational things, as well, and how histories are changing and how when trans feminine communities and trans

masculine communities were very, very separate. And that—you suggested to an extent—I think perhaps that's changing now, and things are much less binary. And that also makes a difference. And if we talk to people much, much younger than we are, than I am, people think in different ways I think now. Which I think is a very healthy thing. We should recognize what we've got in common as trans people, with the struggles. We should recognize the misrecognition, the issues with our bodies and what we should or shouldn't aspire to—and there is no should or shouldn't, but what we're expected to aspire to. And these are commonalities. And these are commonalities that people have internalized and done things with their bodies that they're not always happy with, and that's something that's not often allowed to be acknowledged either. And I think these things are changing. So these are all positive things in generational terms. This will continue, and this will continue—young trans people will still make mistakes as well, but we have a politics that demands that we have—we have a commonality. And we should recognize this, and we should move together. And it's not a trans masculine panel, obviously. And it's very difficult to have that voice. But that's my understanding of how things should be.

00:44:43 Q3 Hello. A little bit of feedback there. Thank you for the panel; I'm really, really enjoying the discussion. Is it okay if I ask two questions? So the first one is, I was really interested in the discussion about reproductive justice and sterilization because I've been thinking a lot about that recently. And thinking about how we have—you know, there was that massive news story, wasn't there, that was like, "In Japan, the government votes for sterilization to be retained as part of law" and there was a big outrage about that. And obviously there's a lot of places where sterilization is, by default, because you have to have surgery if you want to have legal gender recognition. And then I felt like this was one place where the overall point about this being about anti-capitalism came back because in the UK it's, I think, we have a kind of by-proxy sterilization, chemical sterilization for people who can't afford to store gametes, and that's expensive. And most of us can't afford that. So we have that here, too, but we don't talk about that. So I would really love to maybe hear a bit more about that and also to ask more directly: are there any places do you know where that isn't the case and where there is a national service for storing gametes, for example? Or a nationalized healthcare that does that as part of their—I'll just ask one question, that was long.

00:46:10 MD Yeah, I can—I'm going to pass that on. The Netherlands, where I got bullied, they'll store gametes if they don't fuck you over. Obviously I was fucked over because they didn't store mine or whatever. And so these kind of mistakes they make quite often because it retains a sort of eugenical apparatus, right? And then forced sterilization, yeah. We wrote the zine about that Economist article that—managerial classes comes up with this, like, “Woah. We need to really intervene in your bodies.” Yeah of course they do. And of course they think that. Because they're managers, right? It is how they think. So yeah, what can I—forced sterilization, it happens. It happens. It happens here and here it is called—it's chemical. I think that the medication they give you to repress your oh-so-aggressive testosterone, which is also one of those myths about testosterone, is way too heavy. At least in my case it was. Let me talk about my case. In my case, this is how they make forced sterilization possible, by first chemically sterilizing you. So you have this sort of deadzone in the middle of your body, and then they push you in. And at that moment—now, I'm academically trained, but then I wasn't. I was a light technician [laughs, I mean, give me a break. I was a light technician and a dancer. I had no way to resist the gender team. I mean a lot of people are very cool, they go into the gender team and they go like, “Yeah, I got what I wanted. Yeah, yeah.” I was not cool at all! I lost—I didn't win. I was isolated, I had no access to knowledge. Priscilla: Queen of the Desert, was unfortunately my—how do you call that?—my, trans information I had available. You know? All these films from the 90s, actually. Priscilla: Queen of the Desert, Silence of the Lambs, and The Crying Game. This was my trans information I had available. It was really like, old school, right? So it was like, this is partly how it happens. This is why it's so important to be vocal, be loud, to be... to go to things; not to be modest about what the claims are. And it's also why social media, with all it's faults, is still important, because it really, really changed the discussion, I think. And it really made a lot of things possible. And it's really made a lot of resistance possible. Yeah, so the laws are changing. So there's a kind of trick that is played out, especially in the European countries that I know. So what they do is they take away the legal demands for sterilization, right? So suddenly you can get a passport that says any kind of number that you want on it. But what they do, is they keep in the gender clinics, the pathology programs strong. They even, like in Denmark, they closed the trans-led or trans-friendly clinics. Because for me, a clinic does not need to be trans-led, let me be very clear about that. I would like a medical professional that is on our side. I would like a medical professional—the medical professional may be trans, that's fine for me. But doesn't need to be trans. As long as they're on my side, right? So for the—that's what I want. That's why I love self-

medicating, but I don't know if my liver is being torn to shreds by the hormones that I take. I need an endocrinologist. I don't care if the endocrinologist is trans. I want them to be on my side. And I want them to think with me. Because I met, in the gender clinic, for about almost two decades, endocrinologists that were against me. And now I have a GP who I have to tell what to test in my blood. I think that is not good enough. As healthcare, right? I'm a philosopher by now. I'm a light designer, or a light technician. Come on. Why do I have to know about what to test in my blood? Give me a break here. So talking about forced—these are all kinds of things that health care becomes sort of contracted and possibilities around healthcare become contracted, and then the law, the possibilities in the law become sort of shields hiding that out of side. Hiding out of sight what's going on in the gender clinics. Because at the same time that the law's become more easy, the autogynephilia and the autoandrophilia now, the new pathologizing trans, so if you look in the mirror and think, "Woohoo! I'm hot!" Then you have a pathology, right? This is the new pressures that are pushed. So you really have to in these clinics desexualize yourself like, "No no, I just really—I'm so disgusted with my body, so just —" You know? You really have to do this. And this is one of the ways they get to you. This perpetual repetition for a few years, yeah. Okay, just read the zine okay? I don't want to talk about it anymore.

00:51:14 MP One thing I would add around reproductive justice in particular is that one of the problems we face as a community is that we are often getting our information from doctors who don't know what the fuck they're talking about, like you were just talking on. So I've spoken to a lot of particularly young trans men and trans masculine spectrum people who think that the minute they go on T, first of all they're never going to be able to get pregnant again, and second of all, if they're on T for long enough they'll never get pregnant again period. And that's simply not true. Like it's not even remotely true, in most cases. There are some people that it will effectively sterilize you for life, but that is actually a really small proportion of people. I know a lot of trans men and trans masculine people who cycle off testosterone, get pregnant, have a baby, and then go back on testosterone. After like years of being on it, like ten, fifteen years. I'm not talking like two years. Like a very long term use of testosterone. And unfortunately, in a lot of the gender clinics and a lot of the sort of gender doctors who are running around are telling people, "Well this is what you're giving up. You'll never be able to do this again blah blah blah." And that's—it's just not true. It's also similarly related to the fact that there's still a lot of confusion, both amongst doctors and within our own community on whether or not you can take HIV medications and oestrogen at

the same time. So on the trans women spectrum-y side of things, a lot of doctors will tell HIV+ trans women that they have to stop taking their oestrogen so they can take their HIV pills. And of the trans sex workers that I know, like in Toronto, who this effects, a lot of them choose oestrogen, right? And so in downtown Toronto, we have effectively ended the AIDS epidemic amongst most populations except trans women sex workers. Who are still going from HIV+ to having AIDS, and ending up in hospices. Because they're being told by doctors that their oestrogen interferes, when it actually doesn't. There's only two HIV meds it interferes with—Amprenavir and Fosamprenavir, just FYI. All the other HIV meds do not counterindicate oestrogen usage. And so I feel like the misinformation that exists out there is one of the biggest barriers in terms of our sexual and reproductive health. And one of the great things about trans community is we have so long recognized that doctors are not on our sides, that we're very good at sharing information with each other. And I feel like we need to do a lot more focused information sharing on—particularly in this country—on what the reproductive options are, how to access them, literally which clinic do you go to, you know? In Canada and the United States, there are websites devoted to this, there are lists. If you go into like Cal and Lord 00:54:26 they can give you a list of basically every trans friendly doctor in the state, you know? And we don't really have that here. Partially because the healthcare system is structured differently, and often by postcode. But we're not doing that same level of information sharing here, and I think that's a detriment to all of our health needs but particularly around reproductive health.

00:54:50 CH And also, I would just add as well. Culturally I think we need to change the understanding of what trans is, for people coming into the space where they're going to transition. Because their expectations are often given by the main ideas, the normative ideas of what trans is. And of course there are far more possibilities. I think this is happening now with organizations with younger people, saying that you can be trans and you don't have to do—the expectation doesn't need to be that you go through stage, stage, stage, stage.... You can go to this stage or go to that stage, or your expectation might be completely different. But this is a conversation that has certainly begun, and we need to spend a lot of time expanding that conversation and talking about the different possibilities. In terms, for example, of reproductive health and what people can expect in their futures, this is the possibility that you have. These are the choices you can make. But they're informed choices. And then you can make those choices. And there should be no compulsion, and we suffer of course—I acknowledge everything that's been said—we suffer culturally. The forced

expectations, the expectations forced on us by the medical system. And the lack of knowledge within the medical system. But as activists we can empower people by letting them know that there are different options and we should act on that. Any more questions?

00:56:36 Q4 Hi. I'm not very confident with microphones, but I'll try to do my best. Yeah, obviously thank you so much for the panel. It's super important. I'm in the process of creating an organization—Trans Feminism International—coming out of a couple of decades of prison abolition work, radical queer organizing, environmental organizing. I feel like it's all very connected. And while I've been on tour for the last couple of years I've definitely had to, to say—to bounce back to something that Morgan said, there was definitely an experience that I had in North America compared to Europe that I would see like a lot more recognized trans femmes involved in organizing. Otherwise in Europe it's something much less recognized. And I feel like, yeah, part of the work—and it's only a couple of months old, so working out what I want to do. For sure the whole team at the moment is working class and trans and there's something in that, that we're already starting from a very different place from mainstream LGBT or something, which I have no connection with. Wow it's a very long question isn't it. But yeah. I'm curious about those changes, how that—how we can move forward with, for example, in prison abolition or environmental movements or feminism or whatever other movements that are meeting our material needs, which is super important for me. How we can shift that recognition of trans femme labour or trans femme voices and our needs being more centred. Which I feel like does happen in other places more, perhaps, than in Europe. And I feel like in Europe it almost never happens; we're all like barely existing at all. So even if we're talking about HIV, homelessness, precarious employment or something, we're just not very—we're there, but we're just not very recognized. And I'm curious what your ideas are about changing that marginalization, I guess.

00:58:43 CH Well I think the idea of re-centring trans feminism into radical trans feminism is entirely about that. It's entirely about taking the knowledge and lived experience that we have and—but applying it in general terms to oppression, to marginalization, and to fighting on a broad front. To taking trans feminist activism outside just trans issues, creating working alliances with other groups. I'm completely with you about community. These are alliances of political groups. And expanding the conversation in that way. So I think that's, yeah—I think that's what we're talking about. I think that's at the heart of what we're talking about here, yeah.

00:59:36 MP I'm going to go in a different direction, which is that—so, I'm a historian. And you can hear more about that later on the archival panel if you want to come. But let's look historically for a moment. Because basically up until the year 1995, everything trans related was run by trans women and for trans women, with like very little other than sort of Lou Sullivan's FTM International, like there was very little for anyone on the other end of the spectrum. And then there was kind of this cultural explosion that I talked about earlier, and people got very into trans masculine identities and it was really cool and sexy. And then trans women kind of had a reaction. And now, interestingly, since—over the past ten years, we have watched kind of a return to centring certainly the statistics around trans women, if not necessarily seeing as many trans women and trans femme people in leadership. And I would actually say that while we definitely need to raise up more voices of trans women and trans femme people, what—there are two things. One, we need to—as trans women and trans feminine people—do some skill-sharing, because there are a lot of people, who are coming from that fall from grace moment, who—she's not there yet, you know? And we need to help her get there. And it's a journey. And it's a journey we have to go on together and it's not going to be fun. But we need to share some leadership skills; we need to share some political knowledge and things with each other, and then on top of that we need to build bridges broadly. Because if—like, if our ultimate goal is not to reproduce the cisgender binary, then we need to stop being put in this position of arguing that trans women are women, thus we are part of feminism, thus we are in opposition to any man or masculine person. That's not going to get us to our goal. That's getting us to cis peoples' goal. My goal is that we have more seats at the table for everybody, right? So I feel like, internally for our communities we need to do that skill-sharing, we need to build people up as leaders, we need to find effective transformative justice ways of dealing with each other when there are conflicts. Go read my friend Sarah Shulman's book *Conflict Is Not Abuse*; it's very controversial but it's very good. And at the same time, we need to build a coalitional politics with all aspects of the trans community, including those that we don't get along with very well. And let's be real, there are a number of different aspects of the community we don't really like [laughs]. We need to build those bridges. Yeah, that's what I would say about that.

01:02:46 MD I think also, like, when I look at the US and Canada, things seem [a] way younger, public, than Europe. It is—all things trans seem a bit, seem to have been longer underground here. But there's now—there's a few interesting changes recently, though. I

think that Transgender Europe, it used to be a terrible liberal organization. Like absolutely horrible. It's just been recently hijacked. I'm very curious to see how they're going to—if they actually manage to radicalize it. I think the chair is not fully happy in the organization, judging from the discussions that I gauge. But it's really working. But they've also been doing—so the TGU is based centrally in Berlin, right? In Amsterdam, they started a trans-led health clinic, purely trans-led, with a trans doctor. Who is a bit of a problem, but is also supportive. It's a bit of a two-way. You can't always win. So I think these are ways that the collaboration and the recentring of the discussion is actually working in Europe to push it a bit. I think another thing is important—yeah, I agree with everything Morgan says. But I think it's also like what we've been doing for a few years is just, same as you've been doing: going around and talking to a lot of different people in a lot of different places. I mean, I think this is really important to locally and internationally, to work through this internationalism, that it's not like one group is hindering another group. But if you actually work together and push each other up. And I think in Europe that it's now actually happening, and I think it's very important. But it takes time. You know, the Russian Revolution—you know I was a historian—you know how many decades they were working for it, to get it off the ground? Three decades, people. Three decades. It's not just in October when Lenin was in Switzerland. Three decades, they've been working on it. So we're working on it. I think in Europe we're in the middle, the early of the second decade [laughs].

01:05:10 Q5 Hi. Thanks for the panel so far, it's been a really interesting discussion. My question is about what are the kind of priority, practical, day-to-day activities that you guys are working on in your respective organizations or as independent activists? And how can the people in this room sort of support that work?

01:05:38 CH The activism that I'm doing now is with prison abolition, mostly. And not directly with trans people. Trans people in prison have particular problems. And actually, as you said before, the prison work we do is to try and help individuals on a day-to-day basis, make their lives more tolerable in prison at the same time as recognizing that prisons shouldn't be a thing, should be abolished. And we're not trying to reform this, it's got to go away. And that's my main activism. And I think it sits in with this kind of approach very easily and happily. That's my....

01:06:26 MP Yeah, I mean. My political priorities are always around sex work, HIV, and drug use, which leads me to prison abolitionism often and leads me to issues of police brutality and immigration and all of these other things. But my steering is always that intersection between sex work, drug use, and HIV. I think one issue here in this country that I'm particularly distressed by, and interested in working more on, is the sex by deception laws. So this is like the only country, really, where you can go to jail for not disclosing that you're trans before you have sex with someone. Or actually there's one young trans man who's in prison right now for kissing a girl without disclosing that he was trans. This doesn't exist anywhere else, just FYI. This is not a thing anywhere else, just here. And what's really interesting to me about this issue is that it uses the same legal logic that Canada uses to criminalize HIV nondisclosure, so you get charged with aggravated sexual assault by way of fraud. They literally use the same word-for-word argument, and the same section of the law to argue for both of these things. And I think that's something that, as a community, we really need to come together and do something about. Because it's not acceptable that you should have to disclose your trans status at any point, in my opinion, if you don't want to. But I also think it's also this wild centring of like—so like all these cases are young trans men and trans masculine people, usually in the process of figuring their shit out, who aren't even like fully into an understanding of themselves yet. Who hook up with like a straight, white, cis girl and then the parents find out and they freak out and call the police. And it's this kind of queerness as contagion thing going on, which I think amplifies this connection with the HIV nondisclosure laws. Which is also a problem here in this country, FYI. I feel like that's something we all need to do a lot more thinking and talking about; I think it's something we've been very reticent to think and talk about, because so much of the media rhetoric in this country is like, "Trans people are sexual predators! And we're going to come into your bathrooms and feel you up!" But we need to actually have some courage and address this issue, or it's going to get really the fuck out of hand, real quick. Because it's affecting a small number of people right now, but as we grow in visibility and as the rhetoric against grows in hostility, we're going to see this more and more be used as a way to funnel trans people into the prison system who have done nothing wrong. So I would say that.

01:09:37 CH Very quickly, just to expand slightly on what I said before. So the prison abolition is a thing that's important. But the criminal justice system is where these people come into contact with being sent to prison, and the—again, to go back to thinking about what trans means to people who don't have a sophisticated knowledge, this is a

fundamental arena in which these things clash. And people who are judging—and this can be actual judges, it can certainly be people prosecuting, the police, et cetera, the whole edifice of the criminal justice system working on the false premise that this is what trans is. And that this is what trans should be, and if you have been deceptive, it's—one of the sentencing remarks was to one of the young women involved that you would have probably rather have been raped, than have this happen to you. So it's a really horrible construction of what had happened and of what justice is. So again, to go back to changing the perception of what trans is. At a high cultural level, what it can be, what it should be. What—not just what trans is, what gender is, and what sex is, in fact. All of these things are equally important. Then we should—that's part of this whole discussion, I think.

01:11:06 MD Yeah, I think that, tying into that. I think there's a sort of confusion in Britain about what sexuality is in general. I mean, seriously people. Think about that. How you want to support our work. Okay, so I think we were living in a time of mass education, maybe we're just coming out of that, maybe mass education will continue? We have to see what's going on. But I think if you're in education it is extremely important that you support the anti-racist struggles in academies because it's the only way that academies will change. Literally the only way. Because what trans does not need is that it goes the same way as the gay rights struggle, and that's what it's gearing up to do. So it is like—I was a union organizer [disgusted sound]. I hate unions, I hate universities, but it's part of my work now. Yes, support anti-racist struggles in universities is like supremely important. It's supremely important, yeah. Because this is where a lot of people find voice, it's where a lot people find and lose—and I think, don't get me wrong, I see—I see all my trans students, I see eighty per cent dropping out of academies. Quite a lot. But in the universities, I believe, if it becomes accessible for people of colour and Black people, it will be accessible for white trans people or white queer people also.

01:12:37 CH I think we've probably got time for one more question, if there is one. And if there isn't one...?

01:12:53 Q5? I can ask another question [laughs]. I wanted to also ask about the point you made earlier about the joy of trans, and I've been thinking a lot about euphoria and dysphoria as against each other. And I love this idea. I love this—in principle, the joy of trans, it's fabulous, like let's not have the patriarchy or the gender binary and let's all do what

we want with gender et cetera, et cetera. And I think about that in the context of trying to remove myself from the pit of gender despair. But so, then my question is: how is it accessible and how it is accessible without becoming like a kind of liberal platitude about, you know, feeling yourself or embracing yourself or—I'm not suggesting it's liberal in the formulation that you gave, but I'm interested in avoiding that.

01:13:55 MD Yeah, [laughs] how to do that. I wanted to look up something. I was reading it this morning. It's somebody writing about joy, Moralez... Aaliyah Moralez 00:14:11, I have to look the name because I just learned the name this morning. Who writes about joy not as, yay, feeling happy all the time. Because that's not really what we need. It's joy sort of like, in her words, as sort of like, the overarching thing. It is almost like the seed in the middle of trauma, right? It is that thing that is almost protected by trauma and through that, it's the secret or overarching, it's this double movement. That it's like, the moment you say "No!" to the world, right? Because refusal is so important. "No!" You open up this little bit of space, this little bit of space that you might not always be able to fill up, but it's where you're going to go. And it's where you're going to find your voice. And it's where you're going to find... thing. But it's not a moment, right? In this way, it's not an emotion, joy. Like, "Oh, I feel happy today. Even though I feel happy today. Even though my bike got stolen last night. Look, they cut the chains. I'm all for cutting chains [laughter]. But still my bike got stolen." So now, yeah. There you are. Now we get to know a new bike!

01:15:26 CH I can speak—in terms of euphoria, I think there's a problem with euphoria in the limited sense. In the sense that we feel euphoric when we first get given hormones, and we feel euphoric for each little individual thing that we conceive is a victory. We feel euphoric at the change in our bodies, we feel euphoric in these little senses that take possibly this thing away from the politics of the things that we do. The danger is that that's what happens, and we feel we've achieved our own transitional program and then that's it. So I think that's the danger of one kind of trans euphoria. The kind of trans euphoria that we need to see is a celebration of success in deeper political struggle: either success in gaining community, exchanging ideas, being with people different from ourselves and learning from them—this kind of euphoria. Rather than in our individual programs, I think.

01:16:29 MP Not to go in a completely different direction, but I just feel that we often let conversations about trans people and trans issues centre around feelings. And I think we do

ourselves a disservice because it doesn't matter if we like being trans or hate being trans. It doesn't matter if we like our body or hate our body. We still deserve to exist in society, we still deserve to not be harassed by police, not thrown in prisons, we still deserve to receive adequate healthcare. We still deserve a seat at the table. And I think, to me it's a trap. To try and do the wee happy trans thing, or even to be like, "Our lives are pain!" Like it's all a trap. Because it doesn't—it shouldn't be a prerequisite that we get rights based on the fact that our lives suck sometimes and are painful and horrible. And it shouldn't be a prerequisite for us getting respect in society to say like, "Oh we're happy people! It brings me joy to be trans!"

01:17:41 MD [off mic] But who is saying that?

01:17:42 MP Well, there's some people. I don't know if you've ever been on Instagram recently?

01:17:47 MD I have not, I am not on Instagram. [laughs]

01:17:48 MP Have you met an influencer? Because they're a lot. And I just think, again, I'm such a materialist. I think we deserve material improvements to our experiences that are not dependant on whether or not we like ourselves or our bodies and whether or not anyone else likes ourselves and our bodies, because we're human beings and we deserve to exist. So, that was my final thing.

01:18:17 CH So I think that's it. So I would like to thank Morgan and Mijke very much. I would like to apologize to Chamindra for not saying that she wasn't here in the first place. I'd like to thank you for some very interesting and stimulating questions. And to close the session, thank you very much. [Audience applauds]

[End of recording]

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DECRIMINALISED FUTURES

Radical Transfeminist Activism