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**Abstract:** With this article we invite the reader to participate in our multimediatic conversation about collaboration as a queer practice. We map out the ways working together can be generative through an elaboration of the queer theoretic of collaboration as a moving, living evolving archive. Through the example of our translation of *Smagliature*, a book written by several transnational transfeminist groups, we show how collective scholarly work done outside the university calls into question established practices and frameworks of academic legitimacy. We question the notion of individual idea-ownership as base currency for stability in the academic sphere, pushing back against pre-established normative, patriarchal lines of legitimacy that privilege certain modes of resource access and work production. The article makes use of the notions of queer kinship (Freeman), queer use (Ahmed), queer temporalities (Muñoz), queer assemblage (Puar), queer diffraction (Barad/Haraway) as a way to render visible the queer genealogy through which we position ourselves, and with which we actively collaborate, creating a transtemporal queer community of ideas. We discuss how this kind of collective space-building finds safety in the shadows of academia and helps to support marginalized voices in institutions of higher learning. The conversation also explores the potential for this particular moment within the United States—where we find ourselves at the intersection of pandemic shut downs and Black Lives Matter momentum—to open a fissure within the walls of academic visibility and legitimacy. We argue that current discussions about access to resources, and teaching and learning expectations, bring to light the implicit and explicit biases in our current academic value systems. Collaboration—as intellectual and professional work, and as a necessary component of affective care networks—has been particularly important in the face of these transformative events; our inter-university pedagogical initiatives and inclusivity workshops are examples of this kind of connectedness. When we make things together we become disruptive forces in our institutions; we are Deleuzian destructive desire machines with the power to create knowledge and affective communities at the same time. Through a self-reflexive interrogation of the practices that have come to shape our professional, political and personal positions and experiences, this dialogue serves as both a living biographical archive and call to action.

**Keywords:** queer, digital, translation, margins, collaboration

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## Working in the Shadows: Collaboration as Queer Practice

JULIA HEIM AND SOLE ANATRONE

S: Let's see, where should we begin? Maybe on the balcony in Pigneto? O sulla terrazza a Roccasicura?<sup>1</sup> Or maybe on the stoop in Brooklyn. I'll grab the olives and wine.

J: Great. I'm going to finish cutting this focaccia.

S: As I see it, this is a key part of our collaboration. We're already always working, passando da un linguaggio, un'attività, un paese, ad un altro. In all the time we've been collaborating I've felt our work has been this constant translating from language to context to topic, keeping our focus on empathy, care, and revolution close, while allowing ourselves and our work to transform.

J: I would say our collaboration is necessarily a queer transfeminist endeavor.<sup>2</sup> It's been over three years since we started working together on various projects that all in some way have to do with our approaches to queerness, to the study and teaching of Italian, and to the practice of empathetic pedagogy and scholarship. This current moment we find ourselves in, at the intersection of the COVID pandemic and Black Lives Matter momentum, is characterized by a sense of both isolation and urgency—we have talked about this a lot—and I think the work that is being done in response, both ours and society's, is tied to discourses on resources and collaboration. So it seems like an important time for us to be explicit about the critical theoretics that inform our specific way of collaborating and the potential of our often unpopular queer practices.

S: One of our latest projects, the translation of *Smagliature digitali: corpi, generi, tecnologie*,<sup>3</sup> is a great case study for theorizing collaborative academic practice as transfeminist endeavor. The book is a collection of essays by transfeminist activists, artists, and academics. As the original editors themselves say, "This book is a transfeminist queer cyborg. There is no hierarchy between the spaces that united us, we occupied them from time to time so we could be together. There is no hierarchy of bodies, our fingers have always touched as we type on the computer keyboard."<sup>4</sup> The community of knowledge they created and shared with us through this book is a queer techno-community, as they explain: "the authors of this book develop a knowledge around, and with, the technologies that feed, first and foremost, off bodies and experiences. Thus, giving life to a process of the construction of embodied knowledge, in movement, that redefines the boundaries between the margins and the center, challenging reassuring dichotomies of thought and practice."<sup>5</sup>

J: I think what's really interesting here is the idea of embodied knowledge created within and shared through collaboration, because often the specificity of embodied experience causes rifts or *smagliature*

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<sup>1</sup> The use of Italian words and phrases mixed intermittently with the English most accurately represents the way that we communicate and collaborate. The lack of English translation is intentional; it serves as a physical and symbolic border, inviting the reader to look at how lines of inclusivity and legitimacy are created, and how and why people are allowed into, or excluded, from knowledge communities.

<sup>2</sup> We use the term "transfeminist" to indicate intentional inclusivity of trans identities and in direct contrast to other forms of feminism, such as trans-exclusive radical feminism (TERF).

<sup>3</sup> Cossutta, Greco, Mainardi, and Voli, eds., *Smagliature digitali: corpi, generi, tecnologie*.

<sup>4</sup> Cossutta, Greco, Mainardi, and Voli, "Where the Margins Aren't Borders," in *Digital Fissures*. *Digital Fissures* is the title of our forthcoming translation of the Italian *Smagliature digitali*. All of the passages we include here from *Smagliature* are from our translation.

<sup>5</sup> Cossutta, Greco, Mainardi, and Voli.

in feminist and other kinds of activism.<sup>6</sup> And this shows just how much vulnerability there is in publicly sharing embodied experience. Knowledge created and experienced viscerally can cause real pain when it is rejected by the value-assigning authorities within our hegemonic institutions (educational, but also political and social). Of course, this also makes me think about the active choice to remain closeted as a mode of rejecting a visibility shaped and legitimized by systems of power. To come together and share these processes and positionalities in the service of creating empathy, paving space for acceptance and empowerment, and mapping pathways to legitimacy for transfeminist and queer knowledge, theory, and practice, is radical. It is a risk. It has often meant being the easily identifiable other at a conference: identifiable because of physical and intellectual difference. Ma, farlo assieme, farlo con e tramite la tecnologia, really speaks to a kind of collective queer potential that people might just be a little more open to now, as pandemic thoughts and practices shape our realities.

S: Right, and I also think that it's important to specify our understanding of terms like "legitimacy," for us, our collaborative work, and for those whose ideas we are translating. Rachele Borghi's chapter in *Smagliature*, for example, describes efforts to do ethnographic research in postpornography as a form of militant sexual dissidence. But this work moved beyond field study, as Borghi sought to transfer the performative nature of these practices into the university. Through the creation of seminars she is able to imagine spaces of "reflection/creativity that integrate dissident sexualities, and not just in content (the object of study) but also in the translation into practice (the title of the event) inside the institutional space: pornoactivism bursts into the university"; but at the same time she acknowledges that there is a lot of "passing" and "gaming" of the system that needs to happen in order to let such practices enter the doors of these institutions, let alone be "supported" by them.<sup>7</sup> In her chapter, she engages in critical self-reflection when she elaborates on the ways she has internalized certain ideas of legitimacy. She writes: "The university can also become a prison, a space of self-confinement. When you are part of an institution, you often internalize the idea that there are certain actions/practices/ideas/subjects/questions that you can achieve/deal with and others that, to the contrary, are out of place, as is the subject proposing them. In this way praxes are created based on the more or less conscious internalization of the norms, producing self-imposed and self-managed restrictions."<sup>8</sup> Her description of the university as "a space of self-confinement" definitely resonates with me, but there is also an unspoken tension here. We need to acknowledge the creative drive that helps characterize the academic space—it is a key part of what brought us, and what keeps us, here. There's a playfulness, an inventiveness that is possible in ways unique to the academic setting—adesso, per esempio, ho citato Borghi ma in inglese, cioè dalla nostra traduzione, quindi nel citare lei ho citato noi stessi\* creando un cerchio autogenerativo e giocoso, che sfida i confini e cerca nuovi sbocchi, nuove bocche. This playfulness, when we push it and engage with it critically and strategically, can bring to light the limitations of imposed notions of legitimacy and acceptability in academic research and conduct. If we speak through each other's mouths, not for one another but through one another, are we decentering the ways in which power is recognized in the system?

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<sup>6</sup> Feminist discourse and theory has a long history of thinking through the body, see Audre Lorde's *Zami*, Judith Butler *Bodies that Matter*, and Rosi Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, to name just a few. Our decision to include remarks about eating and drinking throughout this piece are in some small way a nod to the embodied nature of our practices as well. We also note that the rifts that discourses of embodiment and feminism have caused are not new divisions; one need only reflect on the inherent divisiveness of Feminism of Sexual Difference in 1970s Italy and the ways in which this excluded gender and sexually non-conforming subjects from mainstream feminism then, and which we see today in very public clashes between transfeminists and TERF and SWERFers.

<sup>7</sup> Borghi, "Notes from the Center's Margins," in *Digital Fissures*.

<sup>8</sup> Borghi..

J: Sì, no, torniamo a parlare di questa bocca rivoluzionaria fra un'attimo.

S: I guess what I'm wondering is, in what ways collaboration and translation, and our approaches to them, work within institutional restrictions and guidelines and in what ways they challenge them.

J: Okay, so you're asking about the relationship between our work as collaborators, our work as translators, the work we translate, and our relationship to institutional legitimacy, whether self-imposed or systemically imposed (even if those can't be clearly separated). We can think about this through the evolution of our translation of *Smagliature digitali*. We were in Rome, in *Tuba*, a feminist bookstore/cafe, when we saw this book and bought it. It was Pride season, and we were talking about how we really wanted to make something that spoke to Italian queer specificity.

S: Sì, ma queer noi lo stavamo usando nel contesto o meglio *dal* contesto anglofono.

J: I knooooowwww. Ma era e rimane comunque una parola, un modo di guardare, un'esperienza, un'identità importante ed utile.<sup>9</sup> Insomma... il libro. We already knew the editors, and admired their work, so we decided the book should exist in English too.



Figure 1: email correspondence between us and the editors of *Smagliature*, July 17, 2018.

All of this, these ideas, these communications were extra-institutional, done from a very anti-institutional approach to knowledge; there was no money to be earned and little scholarly recognition to be hoped for. As Barbara Harshav acknowledges, translation is “a tremendously important profession that isn’t recognized either monetarily or in prestige.”<sup>10</sup> We did it because we believe in knowledge sharing; because we believe that even in marginalized fields of scholarship like queer studies there are marginalized voices, especially in the United States where western, Anglocentric viewpoints are prioritized.<sup>11</sup> Our efforts to get the text published, our theorizing and speaking about it here and

<sup>9</sup> Putting “queer” in conversation with “use” serves to acknowledge how the notions, theoretics, identities, and experiences that fall under the umbrella of queerness may be helpful or “useful” to create senses of belonging, and to challenge existing exclusionary normativities, even if it isn’t necessarily adopted or accepted by non-normative Italian communities. For more on this conversation about the usage of “queer” in the Italian context, see Marco Pustianaz’s important study, *Queer in Italia: differenze in movimento* (2011), in which he engages a number of scholars and activists about what the term means in Italy. We are also using it here as a nod to Sara Ahmed’s elaborations on “queer use”: “there is something queer about use; intentions do not exhaust possibilities.... Queer uses, when things are used for purposes other than the ones for which they were intended, still reference the qualities of a thing; queer uses may linger on those qualities, rendering them all the more lively.” Ahmed, “Queer Use,” *feministkilljoys*, November 8, 2018, [www.feministkilljoys.com](http://www.feministkilljoys.com).

<sup>10</sup> Howard, “Translators Struggle to Prove Their Academic Bona Fides.” Harshav is a former president of the American Literary Translators Association and Hebrew and Yiddish translator.

<sup>11</sup> In Italy, like in much of Europe, gender studies struggles for legitimacy within institutions of higher learning, research centers (like PoliTeSse at the University of Verona, Centro di Studi Interdisciplinari di Genere at Trento, Centro di Studi sul genere e l’educazione in Bologna, Centro Interuniversitario di Ricerca Queer, and Centro Studi e Documentazione Pensiero Femminile in Torino, to name a few) are often the only spaces where this work can occur. The perpetuation of misinformation about the harmful agenda of those espousing “an ideology of gender” is used as a tool for discrimination and hate by the Christian right who aim at shutting down this kind of research and thinking entirely. But this isn’t a case

in the introduction to the book, are where we begin to put the work in conversation with the institution. I think in doing these things we are trying to slowly bend, shift, expand what legitimacy means, or find ways we might be able to live within our own definitions of worth, but live alongside, within, or through institutions of higher learning.

S: To live through these institutions while maintaining differing values, whether it be the value of ideas or the value of bodies, is exactly the practice that we are performing both in our collaborative translation, and in our theorizing about it in this conversation. The dialogic structure, for example, makes it seem like one could easily divvy up writerly attribution based on the demarcations created by our names—an action so often required if and when scholars are up for tenure—but, just like our translation work, and just like our other collaborative practices, we have written both parts. Each voice contains both our voices, but in this way, each piece of the conversation is complex and can hold the dynamism of two perspectives on one idea. It mirrors the plurality (the intersectionality) of each individual, the fragmentation that creates a diffraction of ideas. This work in many ways reflects our feminist collective foremothers and contemporaries—like the Combahee River Collective and the recent Ferrante Project—who sought and seek to make space for their intersectional identities and needs by writing and working as one diverse entity. The words of the Ferrante Project collective are particularly salient in this regard: “We, the editors for *The Ferrante Project*, having finished a bottle of Mezcal in one of our kitchens, out of a burning desire to unshackle ourselves from the anxiety of notoriety, to restore a sense of play, to contraindicate the cult of personality ... hereby announce a collective.”<sup>12</sup>

J: Right, in our work we operate within a system of pluralities: of the individual’s own identity, of collaboration, of translation, and the inevitable plurality of interpretation the reader performs through the process of reading. All of these elements contain a multiplicity that calls into question the idea of authenticity or original work. La mia bocca dice le tue parole—there’s that “bocca rivoluzionaria” di cui parlavamo! We create a palimpsest of words. And when we translate, this palimpsest becomes an original text from and through which to experience the Italian language version.

S: That’s like the Borges story you were talking about where the narrator explains Pierre Menard’s reasoning behind writing *Quixote*: “his goal was never a mechanical transcription of the original; he had no intention of copying it. His admirable ambition was to produce a number of pages which coincided—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes.”<sup>13</sup>

J: Exactly! Our words and their words work together but are evolving, generative things that exist in particular times and spaces, responding to encounters with linguistic and cultural specificity, giving different meaning to the same different text. In this way, when we combine both versions they become

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of “the grass is greener”; in the United States queer studies is often housed in other departments, as a subset of social studies, English, or Women’s Studies, and courses are frequently taught by visiting or contingent faculty. As Gabriel Arana notes: “The problem with housing queer studies within other departments or merely bringing on a visiting scholar or two, however, is that it cuts off queer studies from broader sources of funding (like alumni fundraising) and can leave queer academics marginalized within their departments.” Arana, “The Complicated and Promising Future of Queer Studies.” This strategy of academic marginalization has real consequences, from social and professional alienation and dismissal, limited income and job instability, to the threats of violence the most visible queer scholars face when participating in public intellectual discourse—like Judith Butler’s face being burned in effigy by Brazilian protesters in 2017, or the public humiliation and threats of assault that came with Porpora Marcasciano’s talk at the University of Bologna in the fall of 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Anonymous, “The Ferrante Project: The Freedom of Anonymity.”

<sup>13</sup> Borges, “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*.”

a sort of reversible palimpsest. This, I think, builds on the diffraction metaphor that you mentioned earlier, a feminist metaphor that we borrow from Donna Haraway and Karen Barad: “Diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction. A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the effects of difference appear.”<sup>14</sup>



Figure 2: “IMG\_20170225\_0019” by Farhill is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

The light being the thought/idea/sentence, and the filter is the act of translation, which in turn produces within our practice multiple possibilities, just as the filter of reading produces a multitude of interpretations dependent in many ways on the socio-political-economic-temporal-cultural conditions of the reader (to name just a few).

S: So, our performance of collaborative translation challenges both the idea that interpretation is monolithic and the whole concept of idea-ownership. In the economy of the academe, idea-ownership is the capital with which we leverage our ability to occupy space. If you accrue enough idea-ownership dollars you achieve an economic ranking that translates into secure work and thus livability in the larger economic-political system. Our intellectual output is the currency that is used to pay our mortgage on that [dot] edu affiliation. But, by working collectively to re/produce scholarship we work to show that we are all owners of these ideas, we all possess and dispossess them when we please, we question the value scales on which this idea-currency depends.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Donna Haraway, quoted in Barad, “Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together Apart,” 173.

<sup>15</sup> The challenge to these value scales and the foundations upon which institutional worth is determined is, and has been, taking place across disciplines, institutions, and nations; we recognize the recent work of groups like [The Feminist Art Coalition](#), and the [Queer Futures Collective](#), and acknowledge that this work has legacies that span generations and nations. Most recently, the Italian feminist publication *Donna woman femme* published “Spaccademia,” an edition dedicated to the



J: I'm really drawn to the idea that we can possess them and dispossess them. It feels really freeing to me. My ideas do not permanently define me, even when committed to the page. I can think them, and possess them, for however long or short a time as I need or want to. The traditional model has us bound to our ideas in perpetuity, particularly when those ideas are in print. Much like the way I sometimes feel burdened by the weight of identity politics. Categorizing, identifying, and putting labels on bodies and actions can produce power, because in being visible, in naming things, you are, in many ways, bringing them into existence, you are creating pathways of recognition—hopefully for the better, but often for the worse.



Figure 3: Jenny Mealing / CC BY. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>. We use this image that depicts a fixture at any pride event—a person holding a sign that equates sodomy with sin—as a way of highlight the ambivalent power of semiotic visibility.

But this isn't always the way we experience our identities, or our multiplicities; the mercurial nature of our bodies and the spaces that we choose to or are allowed to occupy impact our identities. We may not always be the things we are or were, we may feel and embody them in different contexts at different times, or we may grow through them.

S: Diffraction! To continue with the Barad/Haraway thread, "The key is understanding that identity is not essence, fixity or givenness, but a contingent iterative performativity, thereby reworking this

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practices of intellectual collaboration in which they talk about the ways collaboration is a practice of revolutionary revaluation: "Il merito, ammesso che si possa definire, è ridotto a strumento individuale per l'avanzamento di carriera. Un sapere slegato da qualsiasi dinamica di fiducia e di condivisione, ma ripiegato sull'individuo che ne detiene il copyright... le esperienze che riportiamo hanno ri-trovato corpo e hanno ri-preso voce nella condivisione delle esperienze. Quelli che, talvolta, suonano come lamenti, sono spazi corali che nominano sofferenze e voci che vogliono rovesciare lo stato della credibilità accademica come ce la fanno conoscere." Ciarniello and Paoletti, "Editoriale."

alleged conflict into an understanding of difference not as an absolute boundary between object and subject, here and there, now and then, this and that, but rather as the effects of enacted cuts in a radical reworking of cause/effect.”<sup>16</sup> In the same way that identity is not permanently determined by context, neither should our ideas permanently determine our positions within the academy. This brings to mind Jasbir Puar’s notion of assemblage as a tool that “enables attention to ontology in tandem with epistemology, affect in conjunction with representational economies, within which bodies interpenetrate, swirl together, and transmit affects and effects to each other.”<sup>17</sup> She frames these connections and affects to highlight the role of power in these relations in a way that seems important to what we are talking about: “The politics of recognition and incorporation entail that certain—but certainly not most—homosexual, gay, and queer bodies may be the temporary recipients of the ‘measures of benevolence’ that are afforded by liberal discourses of multicultural tolerance and diversity.”<sup>18</sup>

J: This brings us back to what we were talking about before: recognition of bodies but also recognition of ideas. We’re talking about the possessing and dispossessing of intellectual property; it is about bringing ownership to hermeneutic ideas, which means that even the reader becomes the owner of the interpreted text, which of course, as Barthes told us, kills the author. If we (as readers/translators), and the readers of our work, are all interpreters, how can we claim “authentic” or “original” authorship? I don’t think we can, and the fact that we can’t calls into question the foundations of the academic houses in which our publications have mortgaged us space.

S: This questioning is happening all over the place. In tiny corners. Like the open access stuff, for instance. For some time now, the idea of creating open access educational resources has been gaining traction. While we acknowledge that digital resources and platforms are also fraught with their own issues of accessibility and inclusion, digital humanities help us create and archive in ways that dismantle economic border walls that systemically oppress minorities. Moving into the digital space can reduce financial burden in many ways; it is cheaper, for instance, to produce a website than to have students buy textbooks (especially language textbooks which are prohibitively expensive).

J: We have been forced, recently, to look at the roles that race and class play in impacting our students’ abilities to “succeed” and perform behaviors that the education system deems adequate demonstrations of knowledge. We need to reframe and redesign the ways time and resources are allocated to students and teachers.

S: These were the same kinds of conversations we were having a few years ago when we decided to found [Asterisk](#). We were thinking specifically about gender and sexuality and the so-called bathroom bans and other forms of discrimination that make education and life difficult, even dangerous, for gender nonconforming students and instructors at educational institutions across the country. We wanted to create something useful, transformative, and immediately implementable that would help all the people that make up these institutions—instructors, students, staff, administration, faculty, etc.—radically rethink their practices to create safer, intentionally inclusive spaces:

Through a series of collaborative activities we work toward understanding the impact of norms and social conventions on the individual and on our communities more generally. All of this aims at

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<sup>16</sup> Barad, “Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together Apart,” 173.

<sup>17</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 205.

<sup>18</sup> Puar, xii.



stressing the importance of expressions of understanding inside the classroom and beyond, and builds towards a pedagogy of intentional empathy that explicitly disavows exclusion and promotes acceptance and recognition of difference through direct and intentional action, behavior, and language.<sup>19</sup>

We designed workshops to help reshape pedagogy and classroom practices, and collegial and community language and behavior. This training and rethinking happens through workshops—we always tend toward workshops—because it is a collaborative model and as such, it is non-hierarchical; the Asterisk workshops are structured to communicate a valuing of every participant’s contributions. I think this is really important because it reinforces the kind of respect we want to see integrated into every aspect of institutions of learning.

J: The other work that we are doing—like our translations for example—isn’t as “within” the system. These workshops focus on recognizing our ability to contribute to structural transformation, they are about building respect and creating safe environments, and they show us that we are all active agents of space-making in our institutions. The collective community created by and within the workshop can be more empowering for instructors; it can show how much we can control even when the frameworks of our institutions disempower us.

S: The workshop model also serves to remind me—and, I hope, our participants as well—of how much we gain from cooperative labor. The toolkits we produce through these workshops are the foundations of new archives of shared resources.

Speaking of resources, *che ne dici di un altro bicchiere di vino?*

J: Resources, right! Can we bring this conversation about resources back to COVID and the university for a second? The strain that the current global health pandemic put on everyone has brought to light the ways precarious instructors are particularly vulnerable; we hear a lot of messages of encouragement and gratitude, but there is no discussion of support, be it financial or otherwise.

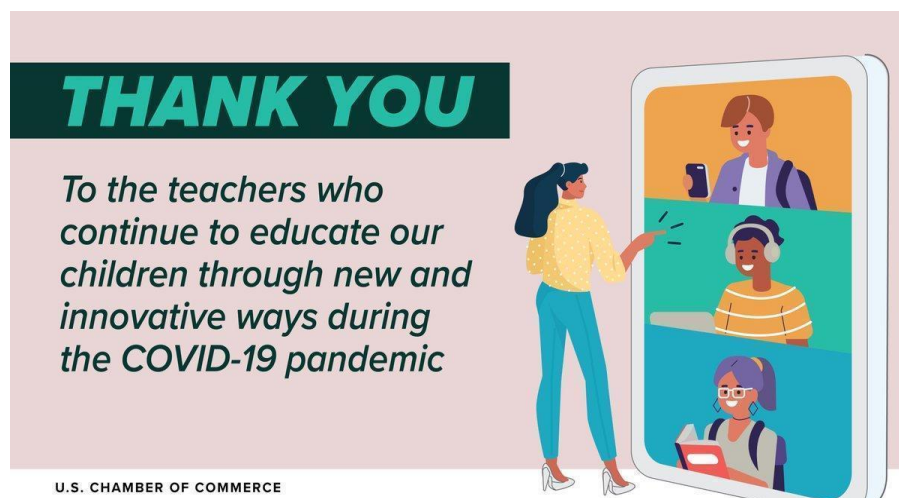


Figure 4: U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Twitter post, March 31, 2020, <https://twitter.com/uschamber/status/1245006050790641664>.

<sup>19</sup> Asterisk: <https://asterisk-academy.com/17-2/what-why/>

Adjuncts are being laid off in high numbers—our fields, queer studies and Italian studies, are being subjected to cuts and full program elimination—and many universities and students are expecting instructors to teach in person—requests made obliquely through language of dedication/devotion to the field and love for the students. What isn't talked about is how students' and teachers' vulnerabilities may intersect but may also sometimes be at odds. What does COVID show us about conditions in the academy when these instructors are minorities, when they work in fields of research not considered "legitimate," or both?

S: A teacher who is suddenly forced to teach from home has to learn to navigate new software and transform their pedagogy. For many of us this is happening in the cramped quarters of a one-bedroom apartment, or in a home with elderly family members who require care and attention, where the kitchen table becomes the office, where internet is unreliable. In the months following the initial COVID shutdown we were cut off from the resources we had in our offices on campus; for some of our colleagues this wasn't a big deal because they have home libraries and workspaces, but for us it meant losing access to the intellectual archives we've worked so long to amass. Everyone in our institutions has been impacted. The expectations of the system are messed up, but not just around COVID. People are impacted by institutions in ways that are systemically embedded and not limited to the effects of this pandemic. Once you feel this on a personal level, perhaps you can begin to do something, to create lines of empathy and effect change.

J: When COVID forced us into isolation we looked for strategies that would make these lines real and effective, sharing resources and collaborating on teaching strategies that were also aimed at self-care and care of the other. Take our pen pal project, for example. When we found out we were switching to remote learning we were already in our homes, our students were in theirs, or were traveling, both of our institutions were on spring break. We were all away and suddenly had no idea when we would be going back. It seemed like a compounding of the feeling of displacement. We scrambled to think of how to respond to this shock for ourselves and for our students. The project we developed sort of evolved out of this thinking, since we were both teaching elementary Italian courses (among other things); so it made sense to replace, or supplement, the collegiate environment we had all suddenly lost with an extended community—we put the two classes in dialogue with each other, integrating this task of forming new connections with the work of learning a new language. Having your Vassar students engage with my University of Pennsylvania students effectively expanded their and our intellectual and affective network.

S: Lots of online groups for instructors emerged during this time as well. There were phone calls and other digital platforms for resource sharing across universities and disciplines.

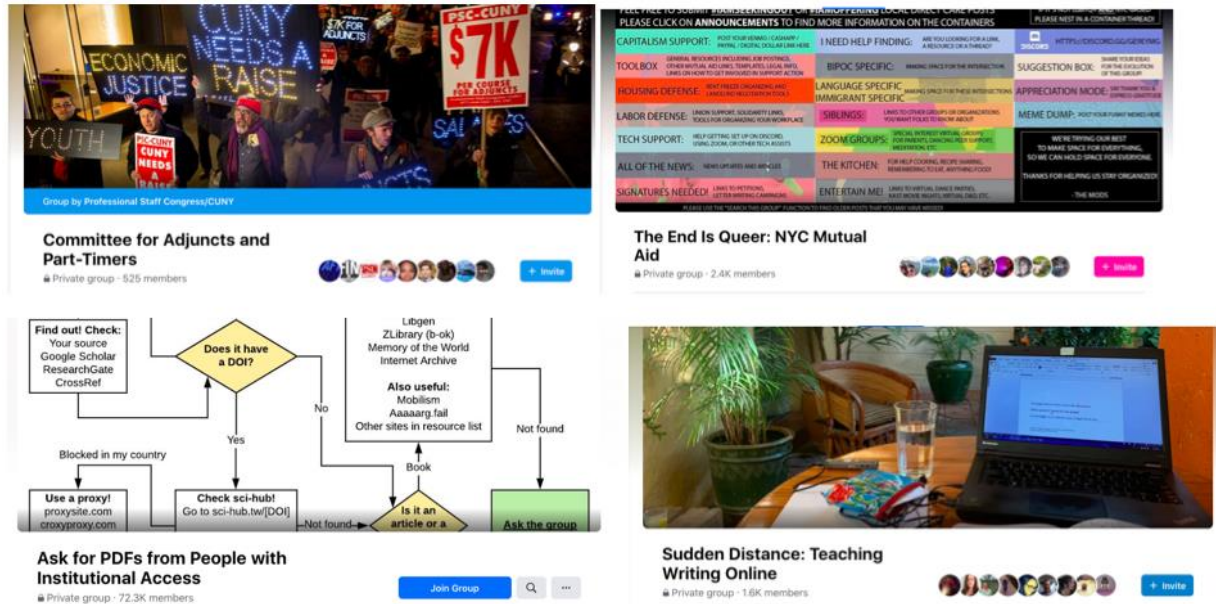


Figure 5: selection of online support and resource-sharing groups we participate(d): Committee for Adjuncts and Part-timers; The End is Queer: NYC Mutual Aid; Ask for PDFs from People with Institutional Access; Sudden Distance: Teaching Writing Online.

Many of these groups were reconfigurations of queer or adjunct or other minority networks that have always had to exist to prop each other up because we expect to be undersupported by institutional structures, and we are prepared. Undersupported and undervalued in resources and scholarship.

S: I remember being in graduate school and hearing a prominent, tenured faculty from another institution explain that the topics I was interested in—gender, race, immigration, sexuality—that these were “*interessi passeggeri, fra qualche anno nessuno ne parlerà più.*”

J: One year I was teaching at a Catholic institution and was told it was ok for me to be who I was—my genderqueer self—as long as I didn’t proselytize. This made me nervous that my existence would become actively unwelcome. Unwelcome in the way that being afraid to use a specific bathroom in your place of work, or being told your scholarship is irrelevant delegitimizes you. You are being told your body and your voice shouldn’t be.

It is important to keep in mind the ways our bodies and our scholarship are deeply linked. When you don’t see yourself reflected in the established spaces or in canonical histories, you have to constantly build everything over again. It is exhausting. This is why we have such high numbers of burnout among queer and minority academics. We are all operating as though alone. Non dovrebbe essere così. That’s why we find and establish communities in the interstices.

J: Communities that subversively operate on the margins in order to nourish and support each other, in order to keep these voices in the institutions at all. This is queer kinship. As Elizabeth Freeman writes, “if kinship is

anything at all—if it marks a terrain that cannot be fully subsumed by other institutions such as religion, politics, or economics—this terrain lies in its status as a set of representational and practical strategies for accommodating all the

possible ways one human being's body can be vulnerable and hence dependent upon that of another, and for mobilizing all the possible resources one body has for taking care of another."<sup>20</sup>

S: There's value in staying in the unregulated spaces; in staying in the margins, in the closet. As Sara Ahmed says, "In order to survive institutions we need to transform them. But we still need to survive the institutions we are

trying to transform. Closing a door can sometimes be a survival strategy; she closes the door to the institution by withdrawing herself, her commitments, from it. She still does her work; she still teaches her students."<sup>21</sup> There is value in doing this work. There is a potential in this marginality that risks being quashed when it is brought into the institutional fold and therefore is made to conform to standards of legitimacy and decorum.

S: Our shadow networks need to be recognized by the institutions as valued labor, labor that is critical and compensated. Shadow networks are about care. Care has been theorized as a critical and political lens by feminists for a long time. Care is often figured here as a site of uncompensated labor or as a tool for creating structures of support that are outside of, or opposed to, patriarchal systems.<sup>22</sup> One consequence of this has been an essentializing of the role of female agency, reducing it to the myth of bio-natural mothering. Rethinking shadow networks of care can be a good way of dismantling the feminist-motherhood trope and simultaneously doing away with the idea that care is excess. We cannot be useful members of intellectual circles if we do not have support. Part of the labor of care and support is creating archives for young scholars to look to, archives that reflect their identities, however minoritarian or precarious. When we are excluded, when we don't have a genealogy to turn to, we do not have institutional support to lean on. We are forced to create our own queer digital archives, our genealogies are buried. It feels like running through mud.

J: I want to take a minute to explore this feminist-motherhood trope, to acknowledge the ways it has been really useful in calling out the patriarchal hierarchies in our institutions. Let's think back, for instance, to the work of Luisa Muraro and the Diotima group; their positions on gender and sexuality are so exceptionally troubling, but we acknowledge the groundwork they laid in this area of feminist-mother, highlighting the ways in which the traditional roles of women and nurturing are devalued. This work attempts to reclaim and bring value to ideas about care. In this way, collaboration can absolutely be seen as a feminist endeavor. But we approach our collaboration from a queerer place. We acknowledge the feminist foundations, but we value ways of nurturing without relying on the false gender dichotomy that relegates care to the feminine. You can look at ideas of nurturing in queer kinship families as ways of challenging patriarchal structures and the binaries on which the feminist motherhood-nurture model depends.

S: Our kinship care community is corporeal, but also transtemporal. I see us positioned rhizomatically between languages and cultures, and building on and through this feminist practice in a queer way and a queer context. Idea-sharing doesn't have to be with people in the same room, or even who exist at the same time. But in order create these connections we, as queer scholars, as scholars of queerness, have to create a shared past. We have to build our archive as we move forward. As José Muñoz says,

<sup>20</sup> Freeman, "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory," 298.

<sup>21</sup> Ahmed, "Feminists at Work," *feministkilljoys*, January 10, 2020, [www.feministkilljoys.com](http://www.feministkilljoys.com).

<sup>22</sup> For the idea of care as uncompensated labor see works by Silvia Federici; for the idea of motherhood as female agency and as an alternative to patriarchal systems, particularly in the Italian context, see, for example, the work of Luisa Muraro.

“The present is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging.... The present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective world.”<sup>23</sup> We have to work across space and across time.

J: Our genealogy that we render visible through these archives is our community, is part of our lived experience. We trace part of this history in *Queering Italian Media*, for example, as we bring together scholars who help us map our queer lineage and simultaneously work to legitimize queerness within Italian studies. This volume is, in itself, an example of collaboration and it comes from a collaborative experience.<sup>24</sup> By including chapters that look at different historical moments and different kinds of media—from Alessio’s study of newspaper and magazine coverage of homosexuality and crime, to Luca’s exploration into Twitter and trash TV—the book acts as an emerging archive that helps us make sense of our positionality and our histories in relation to the mainstream.<sup>25</sup> This is one way that we form our collaborative communities, but it isn’t just with our contemporaries, with the people we share space with, as you said. Dobbiamo riconoscere che conviviamo con i fantasmi. Even in citing people in this dialogue we are constructing our history; we are mapping our genealogy; we are naming the ways that we build our intellectual and affective networks. Our kinship community is a collective assemblage of idea sharing, of production, that is transtemporal and transnational. In talking about our projects and our collaborative history we are valuing our work and acknowledging its legacies and position within the landscape of these intellectual intersections.

S: Something similar is being done in *Smagliature*, particularly in Genderhacker’s chapter on hacking the Spanish archive using a transfeminist, queer approach. Genderhacker talks about archiving counterhistories of queer and feminist groups and zines, and discusses their practice of creating an atemporal genealogy: “In reality this archive is a body, or rather, this archive is my body. This is the archive thanks to which I have grown as a person, as a militant, and as an artist. It is the history of all the references that have helped to (de)construct me as a transfeminist, lesbian, postporno, trans, adrift gender-pirate. This body-archive of mine did not appear from nothing, its existence would be impossible without the recognition of the genealogy of other gender and sexuality dissidents.”<sup>26</sup> Their living archive is queer collaboration; it is the kind of work we are doing even now. Our translation of it broadens the network, expands the collective.

J: Queerness can be generative. Collaborative translation in particular is generative—it is not just a 1-1 mapping (which translation never is); there is something about collaborative work that brings a new third thing into being: original text, 2nd language text, and the hyper-meta-text that is this new project. I want to think about this third thing as a sort of destructive desiring machine. I’m thinking here of Lawrence Venuti’s elaboration of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of desire as a productive force in reconfiguring institutionalized practices. In theorizing a hermeneutic translation, Venuti writes:

Our point of departure is the acknowledgment that the source text comes to the translation process always already mediated, capable of supporting multiple and conflicting interpretations which are limited only by the institutions where a translation is produced and circulated. “Desiring machines,”

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<sup>23</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> We are referring to the Queer Italian Network’s workshop held in New York in September of 2017. This two-day event brought together scholars, artists and activists from the U.K., the U.S., and Italy to discuss their approaches to and research on queer Italian media.

<sup>25</sup> Malici, “An All Italian *Game of Thrones*,” 97-132; Ponzio, “The Lavorini Case,” 13-30.

<sup>26</sup> Genderhacker, “Transcyborgllera.” Citation information for the original Italian can be found in the Works Cited page.



write Deleuze and Guattari, “function within social machines” that repress the essentially “explosive” force of desire, its capacity to “deterritorialize” institutionalized practices: “there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors.” To change thinking about translation is to change the institutions that house the various forms and practices of cultural production.<sup>27</sup>

This idea of “desiring-machines” fits perfectly within the digital feminist discourse of *Smagliature* itself; by inhabiting the digital space in a radical transfeminist way, we can activate these demolitions and bring desire into our practices.

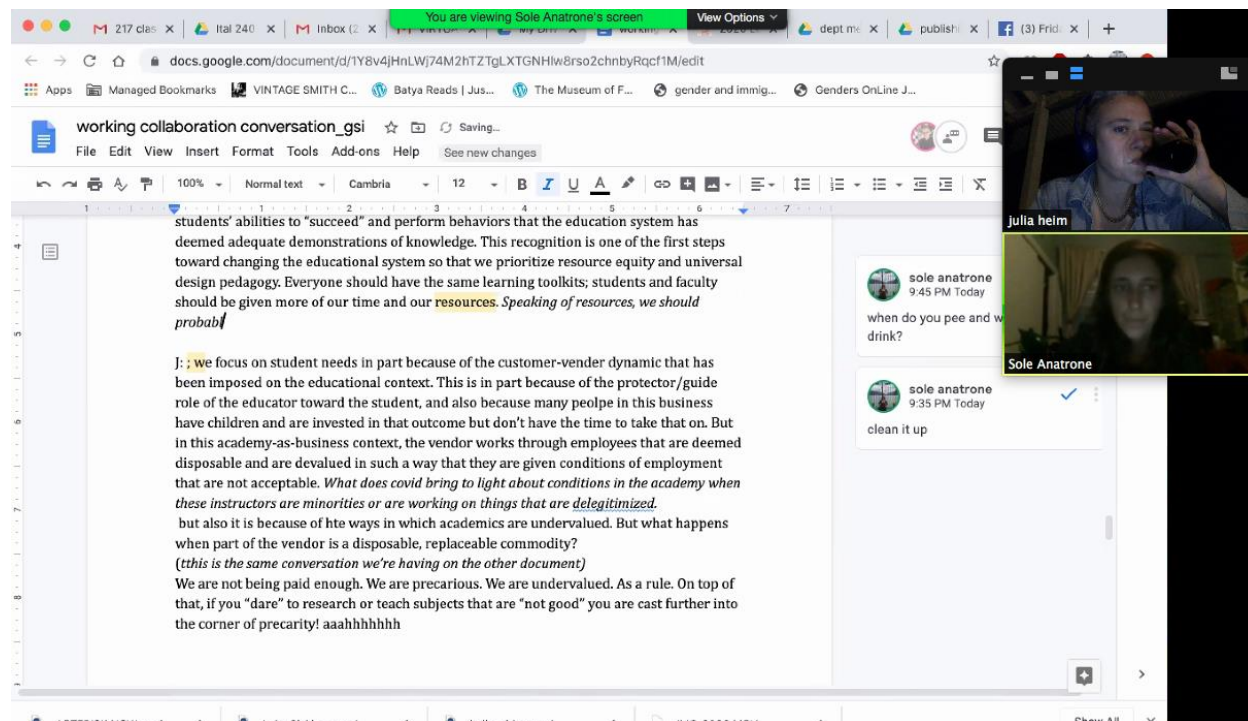


Figure 6: a glimpse into our writing process: screenshot of a shared screen with an evolving word document and the two of us present video-virtually.

The digital medium is itself a kind of mediator, translating embodiedness into other, messier, more malleable expressions of being across time and space. A lot of *Smagliature* is dedicated to thinking about technology’s limitations and potential in relation to the body and radical queer politics (in terms of IVF and sex toys and surveillance), but we can also think about that potentiality as it relates to the academic and intellectual sphere. Digital journals like *g/s/i* expand the ways scholarship is presented (we can include all our links and screenshots in this article); and, because the cost of publication is less, digital platforms can mean that access to these works is less restrictive, thus expanding the audience. Our relationship to the digital also has the potential to create a new kind of intimacy that is evolving (readers can contact us, can visit our websites, we can form new collaborative transmediatic connections with an immediacy that is also very democratic). But, in translating the manifestos and other collective writings in *Smagliature*, we engage in still another act of mediation, creating our own collaborative output that is open to further operations of transformation and generative interpretation.

<sup>27</sup> Venuti, *Contra Instrumentalism*, 40.

S: Sì, ma possiamo capire questa traduzione come una continuazione di un femminismo im/mediato? What is our desire-machine's relationship to theirs? Can our translation work with their deterritorializing impulse?

J: Yeah, if we think about translation as expression of active archive, we can understand our role as translators as being part of a layering of ideas, a layering that is a transfeminist form of border-breaking knowledge production because it moves in marginal spaces and disrupts institutionalized practices of legitimization. The archives that they build, and that their scholarship and manifestic transfeminist thought build, challenge the same hegemonic structures that ours do, even when it does not seem that our local struggles and our local systems of power are immediately linked. They are. Our work in translating theirs is performativity-as-substance. This doing is in itself a thing, it creates as it destroys, and so the doing always feels risky.

S: There's potential in that feeling of risk. There is also pleasure in pushing boundaries. This is a complicated play between the pleasure of [queer resistance](#), and the acknowledgment that actually there are real survival concerns, that this is about our livelihood—financial, physical, and psychological.<sup>28</sup> We must tiptoe inside the institution as we stomp and yell with our collective shadow voices. We make our words and our ideas together. We do it inside and outside the institution, but it is critical that our legitimacy be determined by extrainstitutional systems of worth that we create precisely through collaboration. Doing the work outside but remaining inside has the potential to remap the borders of legitimacy. We are queer cartographers.

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