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# The formation of translation collectivities in Italian queer feminist activist scenarios

## The case of Onna Pas

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This contribution analyses the role played by translation in the emergence of the Italian transfeminist collective Onna Pas. The collective was born in 2019 after a series of workshops centred on the reading and translation of Wittig's and Zeig's work (1975). This contribution examines the formation of Onna Pas using the concept of affective performativity. Drawing on sociological theories of affect (Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Ahmed 2004) applied to translation (Koskinen 2020), according to which affect is a force arising in the "in-betweenness" of encounters (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 2), I understand translation as both an affective practice that brings about "intense" joyful and playful encounters, and as a performative one capable of producing other translations, performances, objects, collectivities and alliances. I particularly explore the unpredictable outcome of translational encounters, contrary to studies of translation and activism (Baker 2013), which tend to stress the notion of conscious positionalities.

**Keywords:** transfeminist activist translation, affective performativity and translation, lesbian feminist translation

### 1. Introduction

This contribution analyses the role played by translation in the emergence of queer feminist activist collectivities. It is in line with previous studies that I conducted on Italian transfeminist scenarios, in which translation was discussed both as a tool for the birth of new transfeminist collectives (Baldo 2019a), and new alliances (Baldo 2020, 2019b). More specifically, this article examines the case of the transfeminist translation collective Onna Pas, formed in July 2019 as the outcome of the translation of the work of lesbian feminist writer Monique Wittig.

Drawing on the concept of affective performativity, I discuss the birth of Onna Pas through its self-presentation in the afterword of their recently published Italian translation of Wittig and Zeig's (1975) *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes* (Wittig and Zeig 2020). There, Onna Pas describe their collective translation as "a political radical act," a "transfeminist practice of socialisation of care, of thinking by feeling," "an erotic practice, an affective enterprise, a collective responsibility and vulnerability" (Onna Pas 2020, 158, 160). Notably, they also use the word 'affect.'

Given these premises, this article draws on sociological theories of affect and emotions (Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Massumi 2002; Ahmed 2004) applied to translation (see Koskinen 2020), and on theories of translation and performativity (Berman 2014; Robinson 2003, among others) to discuss the affective aspect of translation in this scenario, and its performative force, which lies at the origin of the formation of the translation collective Onna Pas.

## 2. Italian, Spanish and French transfeminism

Since Onna Pas present themselves as a transfeminist collective, I would like to begin by defining Italian transfeminism and its links with Spanish and French transfeminism. The term 'transfeminism' can be considered a form of feminism informed by queer and transgender politics. It started circulating more widely after the publication, in 2001, of Emi Koyama's "Transfeminist Manifesto." Koyama defined transfeminism as a movement "by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond" (Koyama 2001). However, for Koyama, the movement is also open to other queer and intersex people, trans men, non-trans women and non-trans men who are sympathetic toward the needs of trans women. Italian transfeminism, however, rather than stemming from this Anglophone genealogy, takes inspiration mainly from Spanish transfeminism.

In Spain, the concept of transfeminism first appeared in the *Jornadas Feministas Estatales* (Spanish Feminist National Meeting) in Cordoba in 2000. Already in the 1990s, however, many feminist groups had questioned the term 'woman' as the subject of feminism (Rodó-de-Zaráte 2016) and feminist and trans groups had already started an intense dialogue around the topics of the naturalisation of gender, trans rights and prostitution (Solá and Urko 2013). However, despite these conversations, it was with the *Manifiesto para la insurrección transfeminista* (Manifesto for Transfeminist Insurrection), written by the transfeminist Spanish collective Red PutaLesboNeraTransFemminista and presented in Granada in 2000, that the term 'transfeminism' became even more popular, especially within younger

generations, according to Rodó-de-Zaráte (2016, 162). This manifesto included not only trans issues, but also a critique of the subject of feminism in relation to sexuality and other intersectional issues. In Italy, the term ‘transfeminism’ started circulating around the year 2010, when the diasporic (Italian, but based in Spain) activist collective *ideadestroyingmuros* (ideas destroying walls) translated the *Manifiesto para la insurrección transfeminista* (Manifesto for Transfeminist Insurrection) into Italian (see Baldo 2019b).

According to Rachele Borghi, one of the members of the collective Onna Pas, an event held in Rome in 2010 called *Le cinque giornate lesbiche* (The Five Lesbian Days), represented the beginning of a wider transfeminist awareness among feminists in Italy. This is also because the event saw the presence of Paul B. Preciado, a transgender writer and philosopher who at the time was working at the Sorbonne and who has contributed to the combination of more traditional feminism with transgender issues. Paul Preciado has become an influential figure in the Italian transfeminist movement over the years, which testifies to the links between the Italian and the French transfeminist movements. In France, the transfeminist movement started at the end of the 1990s and formally went public when the trans collective Outrans published a statement entitled *Transfeminismes* in 2009, and again in a revised form in 2012 (Espinera and Bourcier 2016). A prominent figure of the French transfeminist movement is queer activist and theorist Sam Bourcier, who founded the queer group Zoo in 1996, a collective which “helped raise feminist consciousness for many trans people doing trans politics” (Espinera and Bourcier 2016, 86). Sam Bourcier has also influenced Italian transfeminism. He wrote a book, *Homo Incorporated: Le triangle et la licorne (qui pète)* (Bourcier 2017), which discusses concepts such as gender as work, elaborated by the transfeminist collective Smaschieramenti from Bologna, and translated into Italian by the Italian transfeminist collective CRAAAZI with the title: *Gay Incorporated. Il triangolo e l'unicorno che scorreggia* (Bourcier 2018) (Gay Incorporated: The Triangle and the Unicorn that Farts).

I emphasise the links between Italian and French transfeminism as Rachele Borghi, the person behind the birth of Onna Pas, is an Italian transfeminist activist, professor of geography at the Sorbonne University in Paris and lecturer at the Marseille Academy of Fine Arts. She also has established links in the last few years with Sam Bourcier, as well as with the Spanish transfeminism movement, especially with the post-porn movement which is part of the wider transfeminist movement (see Baldo 2019a).

Spanish and French transfeminism are centred on a transgender epistemology, that is, on the critique of binarisms, cisnormativity, and essentialism, characteristics more typical of feminism of difference. Moreover, Spanish transfeminism aims to critique the disembodiment of the political subject fostered by Angloqueer

theory (Espinera and Bourcier 2016). The issue of embodiment is also central to Italian transfeminist groups, as the next sections will show.

### 3. Onna Pas

The transfeminist translation collective Onna Pas, as mentioned above, was born at the transfeminist political summer camp Agape in Northern Italy.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, transfeminist activist geographer Rachele Borghi had proposed to run a workshop at Agape (meaning ‘love’ in Greek) devoted to the reading of the text by feminist and lesbian writer Monique Wittig *Les Guerilleres* (Wittig 1969).<sup>2</sup> The reading turned out to be a creative re-elaboration of the text, a way to make that text corporal, as affirmed by Rachele Borghi in an interview, which I carried out with the collective Onna Pas in April 2021 (Onna Pas 2021). A year later, in 2018, the title of the workshop was “Feminist relationships,” and Rachele Borghi proposed to read the *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes* by Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig (1975). The text was written in response to the request by the French publisher Grasset, who had commissioned Wittig with the task of writing a dictionary of feminism. Instead, Wittig and Zeig decided to write the dictionary (made of a series of lemmas) hinting at another world, a utopic world inhabited by female lesbian lovers and amazons, from which men are excluded. The ironic, oneiric, and mythical visions of the *Brouillon* were meant to overturn the symbols of the heteropatriarchal system and create a space for lesbians to exist, although only in a fictional way (Onna Pas 2020, 154).

Since there was no published Italian translation of this text, and three participants of the workshop spoke French but not Italian while other Italian participants spoke Italian but not French, Rachele Borghi proposed to the group to abstain from speaking their own native language and instead speak a *melangiato* (blending) to communicate with each other, that is, a sort of creole, a language that was rather a mix of all the languages spoken in the workshop. This language was supposed to overcome linguistic barriers by emphasising the euphoria originating from being in proximity with each other (Onna Pas 2020).

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1. The transfeminist political summer camp Agape (Campo transfemminista Agape) takes place every July at Agape centre, a project of the Valdese church born in the middle of the last century in Northern Italy. See <https://agapecentroecumenico.org/campi/praticare-femminismi/>

2. *Les Guérillères* (Wittig 1969), is a two-part series of prose poems – the first part descriptive, the second episodic – about women warriors in a female-oriented culture.

As Rachele Borghi affirms (Onna Pas 2021), their reading of *Brouillon* was very affective, as they wanted to reclaim an emotional and intimate way of ‘reviving’ Wittig. The focus was not strictly academic in that it was not envisioned as a philological reading, but it was certainly careful although nondogmatic, as Rachele Borghi states (Onna Pas 2021). She claims that she was part of a brigade that wanted to free Wittig from academia, which is holding her hostage. An example that Rachele Borghi makes to illustrate this is the fact that the title of the translation of *Brouillon* published in 2019 is *Appunti* (Notes) and not *brogliaccio* (a literal translation meaning “draft copy/version” that some feminist experts on Wittig’s work would have preferred). *Appunti* was the title chosen by the participants of the summer camp Agape in 2019, and thus the group (political) choice was regarded as more important than any other linguistic consideration.

The idea of translating the book came about after a conflictual event at the Agape summer camp. To solve this conflictual situation, Rachele Borghi, along with Italian postporn activist Slavina, organised a cabaret night at the last minute, a “festive political moment” as she defines it, in which everyone was invited to do a little performance and more specifically, to translate some lemmas of the *Brouillon* into Italian and to playfully perform them on stage. During that night, given that the conflictual situation was unresolved, a woman at the camp called Veronica decided to consult a copy of the *Brouillon*, which was circulating among them. She opened the book at a random page, jokingly asking Wittig, through her words on the page, to provide a resolution to the conflict and asking those who knew French to help her translate the paragraph she just read into Italian. That evening gave the group the inspiration for translating the book into Italian<sup>3</sup> and gave rise to the use of *bibliomanzia* (bibliomancy, or asking Wittig a question and then opening her books and stopping at a random page to see her answer), a practice that Rachele Borghi has been using at presentations of the published translation of *Brouillon* and of her authored book, *Decolonialità e Privilegio* (Decoloniality and Privilege) (Borghi 2020).

During the same 2018 workshop, translation had already been practiced through the reading of excerpts from the *Brouillon*. As another member of Onna Pas states (Onna Pas 2021), the participants in the workshop listened to the text read aloud and picked the most evocative passages or those that tapped into their emotional state most strongly, trying to translate them by relating back the images

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3. There was already a copy of the translation of *Brouillon* done by feminist activist Rosanna Fiocchetto but she had not found a publisher and thus had not published the translation. The workshop’s participants, along with Rachele Borghi, tried to help her find a publisher for the translation (as they wanted the translation published) but the collaboration never took place as Fiocchetto was not well, and thus the group decided to translate the book themselves.

they had stirred in them. Since the workshop was centred on ‘relationships’ and since, according to the participants, there were some terms related to relationships missing from the book, the group decided, following Wittig’s suggestion that “where there is a lack of something, invent” (Wittig 1969), to invent some lemmas, thus giving birth to a fanzine called *Brugliona*. *Brugliona*, which is an Italian calque of the French title *Brouillon*, can be defined as a DIY (do-it-yourself) first translation of the text that explores the languages, the reflections and dreams of the workshop’s participants. The group made Wittig speak for them. The *Brugliona* was contained within a box (a sort of archive), in which every participant had to place the traces of the relationships with their lovers, traces that became the fanzine. The fanzine contains interesting examples of the aforementioned language called *melangiato*, as in the following extract, which contains French, Italian, English and a neologism: “Esperantolo. Je veux find una lingua che sia stream of émotions, free from the rage of pensiero langue du ventre.”<sup>4</sup>

The reading workshop in summer 2018 gave the group the idea of translating the text for themselves. Rachele Borghi, having ties with the organiser of Milano’s lesbian festival *Lesbiche Fuori Salone* (Lesbians outside Milan’s Design Week) that took place in January 2019, managed to secure some funding for organising a translation workshop called “Wittig Mon Amour” within the festival so that the group that took part in the reading of *Brouillon* could physically meet and translate collectively. After this workshop, the group continued translating remotely, assigning parts to one another and revising each other’s translations. In Bologna, in May 2019, the group organised a workshop with Laura Fontanella, who had previously organised workshops on transfeminist translation, thus establishing alliances with other transfeminist activists from Milan. The group was eventually able to complete the translation during another workshop at Agape in July 2019, where the translation collective Onna Pas, which takes its name from the French “on n’a pas,” meaning “we don’t own anything,” was born.

The name puts emphasis on the idea of collectivity, as is also hinted at in the aforementioned self-definition of the group found in the afterword of the translation of *Brouillon*. The group defines translation as collective responsibility, and they recognise the importance of, as they state, “permeating our work with not only an intellectual but also affective, corporal and playful sharing” (Onna Pas 2020, 156). This collective responsibility is also stressed by Onna Pas (2020, 158) when they say that, for them, translation is a sort of “upside mediation,” and “socialisation of care,” meaning that translation choices are discussed and

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4. A possible English translation of the extract would be: “Esperanto (neologism using an affective suffix): I want to find a language that can be stream of emotions, free from the rage of thought, language of gut feeling.”

approved following an ethos of care.<sup>5</sup> In the next section, I will discuss in more depth the meaning of affect in this translational context and its role in the formation of this translation collective.

#### 4. Affect, performativity and translation

The narrative of the birth of this transfeminist translation collective is permeated by the presence of the term ‘affect.’ The 2018 workshop dedicated to the reading of Wittig and Zeig’s *Brouillon* has shown that the reading and the first informal translation of the text were very affective as they were focused on the emotions evoked by the text. The group also claim their affective and playful involvement with Wittig’s text, to the point of personalising the text (as in the description of the practice of bibliomancy) and bringing Wittig back to life, claiming that they want to free her from the chains of academia. Their relationship with the text and with Wittig as an author is very corporal and affective, as testified by the slogan used by the group: “Wittig, una di noi” (Wittig, one of us). Moreover, affect can be seen in the fact that the group stresses the importance of gathering and spending time together to complete the translation, and places much emphasis on the affective relationships among the members of the collective, pointing to the fact that translation decisions need to be consultative and approved collectively. The interview with members of Onna Pas (Onna Pas 2021) shows, for example, that the collective is resolving the negative emotions circulating among them, trying to address them in order to not tear apart what they define as a ‘collective body.’

‘Affect’ is used by Onna Pas in line with a long feminist tradition of thinkers who have criticised the binaries women/emotion, men/reason and private versus public space, contributing to a rethinking of traditional Western epistemology, founded on the Cartesian separation of body and mind, which associated mind with objectivity and abstraction and the body with irrationality and bias. Feminist thinkers who have certainly influenced Onna Pas’s theorisation of affect are bell hooks and Audre Lorde, whose work, respectively on the links between the ethics of love and freedom (hooks 1994), and the erotic as power (Lorde 1984), has been

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5. Examples of collective translation solutions are, for example: not translating the French generic pronoun into Italian in every instance in order to ease the reading (without, though, misrecognising its importance); adapting the terminology referring to lesbian French communities at the time in which Wittig and Sande were writing with contemporary terminology referring to Italian lesbian communities; literally translating terms such as *race* and *civilizations* as these had different meanings then than that which they have acquired nowadays (Onna Pas 2020).



translated or retranslated into Italian in recent years (hooks 2020 and Lorde 2014). Another influence has been the circulation in Italy of the work by feminist independent scholar Sara Ahmed (see Ahmed 2019; 2020; 2021), which will be discussed in more depth in the following pages.

The concept of ‘affect’ has raised substantial interest across various disciplines in the last two decades, which led to an ‘affective turn’ (Ticineto Clough and Halley 2007) in the humanities and social sciences. However, as stated by feminist scholar Ann Cvetkovich (2012), using the term ‘affective turn’ implies that there is something new about the study of affect, while, if we take into consideration what is said above on feminist thought, this is not the case. Certainly, what we witnessed in the last two decades is a bulk of work that draws specifically on Gilles Deleuze’s understanding of affect, inspired by Spinoza’s notion of *affectus*, as the capacity of the body to affect and become affected (Kolehmainen, Lahti and Lahad 2022). Deleuzian studies have emerged from cultural studies on embodiment which, similarly to feminist studies, turned away from the Cartesian split between body and mind.

According to Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010, 1), who put together an edited collection of papers on the notion of affect called the *Affect Theory Reader*, affect has to do with visceral and vital forces “other than conscious knowing [...] that can serve to drive us toward movement.” Thus, affects can be conceived as unconscious energies that drive us towards action.

In Gregg and Seigworth’s edited book, we find a plethora of differing theorisations of affect. According to Cvetkovich (2007), ‘affect’ is an umbrella term which also includes words such as ‘feeling’ and ‘emotion.’ Following Koskinen (2020), I prefer to use the term ‘affect,’ which I have also employed in past publications, as it is more specific than the more general term ‘emotion,’ which has also been conceived in various studies as separate from the term ‘affect’ (Cvetkovich 2007). According to these studies, while emotions are understood “as personal experiences and states, like anger, disgust, fear, happiness and sadness,” affects are “the forces that precede, produce, and inform such experiences” (Shaviro 2016). Moreover, affect is considered an unconscious force, a non-conscious experience of intensity (Shouse 2005), prior to and/or outside of conscious awareness (Massumi 2002), while emotions are considered conscious forces.

However, feminist independent scholar Sara Ahmed, who mainly uses the term ‘emotion’ instead of ‘affect’ in her work (Ahmed 2004), stresses the fact that emotions, like affect, are relational and circulate outside the subject, creating bodies and subjects as the effect of said circulation. The same emphasis on relationality that Ahmed discusses with reference to emotions is present in studies of affect that stress its position at the level of the encounter between bodies. Most importantly, Ahmed regards emotions not as psychological states but as social and cul-

tural practices (Ahmed 2004), which involve a stance on the world, meaning that affects are political.

My analysis of affect starts from Ahmed's (2004) assumption because Ahmed's thought was also inspirational for some Italian queer feminist collectives, as outlined above. Given that my area of research is queer feminist activist translation, which can be considered part of politicised and sociological approaches to translation, I follow in the footsteps of Kaisa Koskinen's work, which belongs to the field of sociological studies of translation (Koskinen 2012, 2020). Alongside Koskinen's study (2020), I will mention some other sociological, politicised and feminist studies of translation here that have applied the notion of affect to translation, acknowledging the fact that these studies are still scarce in comparison to the majority of research on affect which has been carried out within cognitive studies and where the most frequently used term is 'emotion' rather than 'affect' (see, for example, Hubscher-Davidson 2017 and Rojo 2017).

Douglas Robinson in the 1990s introduced the idea of the "somatics" of translation and talked of a "gut feeling" (1991), referring to the need by translators to listen to the corporal feeling that the source language text evokes in them in order to be able to produce an emotionally alive translation. Feminist translation scholar Gayatri Spivak (1993) states that translation is "the most intimate act of reading" and that translators need to surrender to the texts, and should not translate until they feel comfortable enough to talk about intimate things. Elena Basile, referring back to Spivak some years later, examines the translator's affective and erotic engagement with the source text (Basile 2005), while Carol Maier (2006, 58), argues that the text is a body, and thus to translate a text one has to feel "one's way through its construction." Similarly, in more recent times, Luis Perez-Gonzalez (2016), analyses how affect is generated by the practices surrounding the production and reception of subtitled material by fans, focusing on the idea of affective receptivity and on the creation of participatory communities. Finally, Koskinen's (2020) recent major study on affect and translation explores the role of affect in various translatorial settings, from public service interpreting to multilingual poetry recitals, from translator training to translation technology, focusing on the notion of affective labour and on the concept, drawn from Sara Ahmed (2004), of the stickiness of affects.

Some of these understandings of affect are also hinted at in the scenarios analysed in the previous sections. There we find, for example, Robinson's theorisation of a 'gut feeling' that some participants in the workshop on Wittig also mentioned in the interview (Onna Pas 2021) in relation to their modality of approaching the reading and the translation of extracts of *Brouillon*. Moreover, the workshop participants talk about their affective engagement with Wittig's text, an engagement which resonates with Basile's ideas (2005). They also mention

their playful interventions in the text according to the agenda of the translation collective, elements of which resonate with the work of Perez-Gonzalez on the role of affectivity in self-mediation (2014, 2016), the idea that fansubbing is based on non-representational interventionist practices (Perez-Gonzalez 2014), and on the fact that it aims to bring onto the screen the subjectivity and emotions of fansubbers and also of viewers, facilitating “the perception and acknowledgment of mutual affectivity” (Perez-Gonzalez 2014, 255). Perez-Gonzalez focuses on these interventionist fansubbing practices as a sign of the ‘demotic turn’ in audiovisual translation, that is on the democratisation of translation practices and on the participation of common citizens in them, as can be seen in the comments made in the interview with Onna Pas (2021). There, we hear about the group’s urge to create a sense of collective expression through the words of Wittig and to free the author from the chains of elite academia, making her available to a wider audience, all elements that confirm Perez-Gonzalez’s (2016, 120) theorisations on fansubbers invested in building a “collective sense of affinity.”

Onna Pas describe their translation as a “desecrating but respectful one” (“*dis-sacrante ma non irriverente*”). Koskinen’s study (2020), similarly, references the concept of translatorial playground, which has to do with the playfulness of translation. For Koskinen, translation can be considered a playground in those situations in which “the idea of equivalence is carnivalistically eschewed in favour of exhibiting affective qualities such as fun, wittiness, creativity or activism.” (2020, 148). In the interview with Onna Pas (2021), the group indeed stresses the ludic aspect of translation, when they mention the use of comic cabaret and the fanzine born out of the workshop at Agape, and the fact that they wanted to translate mainly in order to entertain readers, to make them laugh as they had laughed during the translation process, given that Wittig’s text is also ironic and humorous.

Considering the affective ludic energy that the Agape workshops generated, including the erotic energy also mentioned by the group in the translation’s afterword (Onna Pas 2020), it is important to point to the definition of ‘affect’ given by theorist Brian Massumi, who describes it as an intensity, as “unqualified energy” (2002, 27). This energy, borrowing Anna Gibbs’ (2008) concept of affect-contagion, can be considered a contagious energy, which can give rise to new experiences by mobilising affect and desires in its wake. This energy is a force generated through encounters. According to Gregg and Seigworth (2010, 2), “affect is in many ways synonymous with force or forces of encounter” and “affect is born in the betweenness” of encounters. It is through encounters, through interaction, that affect produces action. According to Latour (2004, 5), “to have a body is to learn to be affected, meaning effectuated, moved, put into motion by other entities, human and non-human.” As such, studies on affect emphasise the circulation of energies among bodies and the potential of bodies to be affected.

Affect is thus performative, as underlined by Sedgwick (2003), as it holds the potential to produce action and transformation. In the scenario under analysis, translation is affective and performative as it gives birth to a translation collective and to other objects, performances, practices and alliances (respectively a fanzine, a cabaret, the practice of bibliomancy, networks with other translators). This shows the importance of considering, as asserted by scholars of affect, the non-human forces (objects, events, atmospheres), which add to the productivity of translation.

Translation scholarship has long stressed the performativity of translation, especially since the recent so-called ‘performative turn’ in translation studies, mainly in the field of theatre and performance translation (Bigliuzzi, Kofler and Ambrosi 2013). For Douglas Robinson (2003), mentioned previously in relation to the somatics of translation, translation does something to its audience; it has an effect on them. According to translation scholar Sandra Bermann (2014), translation is a transformative activity as translations create new personas and new ideas. Bermann (2014) proposes potential links between Butler’s theory of gender performativity and Derrida’s (1977) theory of iterability according to which translation, like all language, entails repetition leading to the transformation of meaning. She suggests that this citational potential of translation plays a significant role in the exaggerating, displacing, and queering of normative expectations across gender, culture and language within a society, and that it is the encounter with alterity that gives translation the potential of producing a transformation of subjectivities and language.

Given these premises, in the final section of this article I will discuss the birth of Onna Pas by drawing links with the Italian transfeminist context and with other scenarios in which the affective performativity of translation is apparent.

## 5. Translation and the birth of collectivities in Italian queer feminist activism

The discussion of the birth of Onna Pas has shown that translation in activist scenarios is an affective and performative activity, a force capable of building collectivities and affective networks and alliances. Affect is an important element to consider as it helps to explain the reasons, the features, and the modalities of the birth of these collectivities and alliances. Moreover, looking at affect confirms what some translation scholars who engaged with the notion of activism, such as Mona Baker, affirm about the performativity of translation. As we previously stated, affect arises in the “in-betweenness of encounters” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 2), and this confirms Baker’s assertion (2013, 23–24) that translation “does

not mediate cultural encounters that exist outside the act of translation but rather participates in producing these encounters.” It is through such encounters that translations and collectivities are born and social and political transformation is possible.

Indeed, Onna Pas (2021) stress in their interview the fact that their translation is a political activity, and this politicised aspect of translation explains both their motivation for translating Wittig, a lesbian feminist writer, and the method, as they insist on the importance of the bodies gathered together, the importance of the collective as a political body.

However, contrary to studies of activism and translation which emphasise the conscious positionalities which lie beneath the transformative potential of translation, I find the notion of affect particularly useful for giving an account of the unpredictable outcomes of the affective encounters that take place within activist scenarios. The unpredictability of these outcomes is due to the unconscious aspect of affect (Gregg and Seigworth 2010) that drives people toward action. In the interview with Onna Pas (2021), this unpredictability is felt strongly when, for example, the group states that they originally had no intention to publish the translation and that they felt, at times, surprised at the outcomes produced by the initial gathering at the Agape workshop in 2018. Among these outcomes, while the birth of the translation collective is certainly a major result of that first initial gathering, Onna Pas is much more than simply that, as it is mainly a group of friends, some of whom work together to organise Agape’s transfeminist summer camps.

Besides being a concept that better explains the nuances of the phenomenon under analysis, ‘affect’ has also been a buzzword in queer Italian feminism in the last few years, as mentioned above. Personally, I first started thinking about the concept of affect in my research while working on the book series *àltera* published by ETS in Pisa (Italy), a publishing house established by queer scholars Liana Borghi and Marco Pustianaz in 2010 which has been very influential in the spread of queer theory among queer activists in Italy.<sup>6</sup> In addition to being a theme of some of the works published in the book series, ‘affect’ was also a concept Liana Borghi in particular was fascinated by and that she drew from Ahmed’s work. During an interview with me in relation to *àltera* (Borghi 2014), Liana Borghi stated that translation is “an effect of affect,” as the group which collaborated on the translations did so “because of friendship, solidarity, passion and interest.” Liana Borghi (2007), on the website of *Società italiana delle letterate* (The Italian

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6. In 2013–2014, I collaborated with *àltera* by co-editing and co-authoring a book for the series on the drag king phenomenon in Italy entitled: *Il re Nudo. Per un archivio drag king in Italia* (Baldo, Borghi and Fiorilli 2014).

Society of Literate Women), which she co-founded in 1996, also quotes the following words by Sara Ahmed (2004): “Emotions move among bodies and signs and ‘make things’, turn people into communities – bodily spaces into social spaces – through the intensity of the attachment” (Borghi 2007).

Alongside Onna Pas, I would like to refer now to other transfeminist scenarios that I investigated in previous publications and in which translational phenomena were linked to the birth of collectives and alliances. This is also because Onna Pas (2020, 160) state that their work inserts itself within an Italian lesbian feminist genealogy of activist translations.

One of these scenarios concerns the translations of the works by Spanish transfeminist post-porn performers and activists Diana Torres and Itziar Ziga, whose works were translated into Italian between 2014 and 2017. In a similar vein to Onna Pas, the translations were done by a group of translators who worked either on their own or in collaboration with each other. With regard to the translations of Ziga and Torres, I had stressed in a previous publication (Baldo 2019a) the affective involvement of translators with the authors they had translated, and the importance of acting collectively in feminist activism, which was especially highlighted by Ziga in *Devenir Perra* (Becoming a Bitch) (Ziga 2009), translated as *Diventar Cagna* (Ziga 2015), where she states that doing queer transfeminist politics means regaining possession of one’s body in its connection and alliance with other bodies – the “pack of bitches.”

Similarly to the cabaret night organised by the members of Onna Pas performing extracts of the translation of Wittig and Zeig’s *Brouillon*, the published translation of Ziga’s work (2015) was preceded by a series of performances by Italian post-porn performer Slavina, who had translated a portion of Ziga’s work and performed it in Rome in 2011 at the ‘Ladyfest’ festival, and subsequently in 2013 as part of a cabaret named after Ziga’s book. In both scenarios, these performances helped create a more corporal and affective relationship with the source text, which resulted, in the case of Onna Pas, in the strengthening of the affective relationship within the group, a strengthening that favoured the creation of the collective. In the case of the translations of Ziga and Torres’ works, these were accompanied by the alliance between Italian post-porn performers Slavina and Rachele Borghi, aka Zarra Bonheur, who staged a series of post-porn performances.

Finally, these translations also certainly contributed to strengthening the activities of the transfeminist collective Cagne Sciolte (Bitches Unleashed), born in Rome in 2013, which had hosted the aforementioned cabaret where Slavina performed. It is interesting to note that this collective took inspiration from a translation, more specifically the feminoska’s 2013 translation into Italian of “The Bitch

Manifesto,” written by American feminist Joreen Freeman in 1968.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the existence of this collective also contributed to the decision to publish the translation of Ziga’s book, as, according to Valentine, one of the translators, reclaiming the word *cagna* (bitch, whore) in translation in order to fight slut-shaming acquired a stronger sense because of the existence of Cagne Sciolte.

Given these premises, the birth of collectivities can be understood as being inspired by translation and as an outcome of affective performances, which make participants embody translation and feel through translation. In the case of the translation of Ziga and Torres, translator Valentine also became a performer, under the name of Fluida Wolf, and organised workshops on female sexuality based on the content of the books she translated.

As I claimed in previous publications (Baldo 2019a, 2019b, 2021), in these transfeminist activist scenarios translation can be understood as following a DIY (do-it-yourself) and DIT (do-it-together) ethos, as a tool for self-experimentation and change. For example, before the published Italian translation of Paul Preciado’s (2015) *Testo Yonqui*, a narrative about the self-injection of testosterone outside the medical-juridical protocol for sex change, the text had been translated by the collective *Consultoria queer of Bologna*<sup>8</sup> (Queer Counselling/Clinic of Bologna) and was used in 2013 as a tool for their self-enquiry (autoethnography) within a workshop that focused on testosterone.

Onna Pas is therefore a translational transfeminist collective, born out of a series of playful workshops and performances based on translation. This affective collective body was constructed during a series of playful workshops, performances and practices, in tune with the ludic and utopic tone of Wittig’s work. The name of the collective itself, which in French means “we don’t own anything,” indicates the willingness to not possess the translation produced, further reinforcing the importance of collective authorship.

These and other elements discussed in relation to Onna Pas are also found in other similar transfeminist activist scenarios and they further highlight the fact that affect and performativity are crucial elements of transfeminist activist scenarios.

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7. For more information about this collective, see Baldo (2019b). Cagne Sciolte occupied a former nightclub, which had been closed in 2008 because of accusations about exploiting prostitutes, and called itself “cagne” (bitches, sluts), with the aim of reclaiming the insult for oneself, against any form of exploitation and in favour of free and self-determined choices.

8. The “Consultoria queer” Bologna is inspired by the feminist initiatives of self-help clinics of the 1970s in Italy and considers health in non-pathologising terms.

## 6. Conclusion

This article focuses on the birth of the transfeminist and translation collective *Onna Pas* by drawing on the concept of affective performativity. Affective performativity brings together scholarship on affect (and affect and translation, Koskinen 2020) and on the performativity of translation (Robinson 2003) and represents a concept that I believe can give a better account of the analysed translation scenario, as affect is very performative.

Starting from the idea that affect arises in the in-betweenness of encounters, from the relationship between bodies, objects and atmospheres, I understand translation in the case of *Onna Pas* as an affective practice, as an outcome of intense joyful, playful, erotic and also conflictual encounters, capable of producing other encounters and eventually forming communities. Translation is also performative because of its productivity. It produces not only communities, but also other translations and practices, often through the use of performances and practical workshops which experiment with the body and make the experience of translating an embodied one.

Thus, I believe that in transfeminist activist translation scenarios like the ones analysed in this article, the concept of affective performativity can provide an interesting analytical tool for understanding both the translation processes and the methods that might lead to the birth of collectivities.








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