Summerspeaker
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Physical Realities and Social Constructions
February 2012

Anarcho-Transhuman Issue #1:
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Over the last few days, I've found myself in a number of conversations that involved criticism of penis-in-vagina (PIV) intercourse on feminist grounds. Blogger lateralpazwalk recently came out as an anti-PIV man, which generated a fascinating radical feminist discussion on Facebook. After FCM's piece about Hugo Schwyzer exposed them to the critique, the folks on RevLeft employed the opportunity to dismiss it as feminism run amok and bemoan the horror of supposed puritanical extremists such as Andrea Dworkin (may the God who does not exist rest her soul). Even a rather knowledgeable and even-handed RevLefter had no compunctions against blithely proclaiming PIV right for the majority of human species.

So what's going on here? Why such noise and heat? What makes this one sex act so simultaneously sacred to Abrahamic religious fundamentalists, evolutionary biologists, and random straight people on the street? Radical feminists like Dworkin and FCM make a compelling case for its central role in patriarchal oppression. The responding outcry bolsters their point and shows the importance of PIV to straight identity– espe-

cially straight dude identity. I find the materiality of FCM's indictment particularly intriguing. While any self-respecting queer theorist should recognize the trouble in privileging PIV sex as the one true path, most would balk at suggesting inherent problems. FCM emphasizes the health hazards to females in the form of pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, and injury. These dangers in turn generate emotional and psychological harm; FCM goes so far as to describe the positive feelings often associated with PIV as a trauma-bonding.

Coming from a background in Shulamith Firestone's thought and transhumanism, FCM's insistence on the relevance of corporeal experience resonates with me. Reproductive biology matters; Firestone traces the origins of women's oppression to female status as the means of reproduction. Though ey made no critique of PIV intercourse, Firestone's materialist analysis lends itself to that position. PIV sex is what makes females undergo the process ey described as like shitting a pumpkin. The nightmare of compulsory pregnancy walks hand in hand with compulsory PIV intercourse. It's there hiding in the shadows whenever a parent pressures a child to produce grandchildren. Vast cultural forces demand heterosexuality, PIV, and breeding. We need attacks on this oppressive apparatus from every angle possible. In this sense, FCM and company contribute to the good fight. (Indulge, if you would, my vain hope that all ours sweat and tears constitute a collective struggle that can lead us to a better world.) I have difficulty imagining the patriarchy without PIV as an enshrined institution, though also a profound respect for its mutability.

At the same time, the self-styled pro-sex opponents of this perspective bring an important critique of their own. They rail against what they view as an attempt to code sex as a bad and regulate individual sexual expression, invoking the repressive sexual morality of organized religion. They remind us that no good would come from the policing of individuals' sex lives.

While always something to watch out for as anyone who grew up under the spell of religion knows, I consider this fear mostly misplaced. The historical censorship alliances between anti-porn feminists and Christian moralists do give cause for alarm, but they strike me as marriages of convenience more than anything else. Moreover, the same affinity does not apply on this subject. The allegation of puritanism against PIV critics becomes strange when one considers the record: Who has greater respect for that act the Abrahamic religious hierarchy? For hundreds of years they've been the ones mandating PIV by divine degree and denouncing other sex acts as a diabolical or unnatural. Straightness has indeed been a narrow road to travel. Going after PIV intercourse strikes at the heart of the traditional family and is anathema to the adherents of Abraham.

It should go without saying that there's nothing necessarily oppressive about any interaction of human bodies that can happen without significant physical injury. Radical feminists may well veer into essentialism and conflation of construct with material reality, but if so they do these things for a legitimate political purpose. We're talking about the lives of billions here. Reaction against so-called feminist extremists is exactly that: counterrevolutionary reaction that supports the status quo either explicitly or implicitly.

Transhumanism enters the debate offering both a belief in making PIV safe for those who desire it and deconstruction of that act's privileged position. The technofix doesn't interest me in this case, so I'll jump to number two. As tons of folks get off just fine from much less risky sex acts, rational reflection shows preference for PIV (and penetrative sex in general) to be based overwhelming in antiquated if not downright superstitious cultural narratives. Why should we respect irrationality in this matter? Current birth control debates sound absurd when you consider their foundation in a binary opposition between PIV intercourse and the much-dreaded abstinence. Pregnancy isn't

likely for potential breeders engaging in anything other than PIV – and it's downright impossible for folks with the same genital configuration. It's a pity rationalists have given little attention to this subject. (Anyone care to guess why that is?)

I urge serious consideration of the critique presented by Dworkin, FCM, and company. We will never achieve genuine revolution without radically rethinking and remaking all of our personal relationships. At a minimum, PIV intercourse – and penetrative sex in general – has to lose its sacred status and pivotal place in dude supremacy for the project of sexual liberation to proceed. Despite popular opinion, sex doesn't require sticking a cock somewhere.