

## Agreeing with Kant

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In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas categorised sexual practices between people of the same sex among the «*crimina carnis contra naturam*». About five-hundred years later, the definition was taken up by Immanuel Kant, for whom «the union between *sexus homogenii*» is a «contemptible, degrading, abominable» act, even more dreadful than suicide. «It degrades human nature», continues the famed Enlightenment philosopher, «to a level below that of animal nature», and for this reason, it elicits more than just «condemnation», it evokes «disgust».

Codified later by 19<sup>th</sup>-century medicine as an identity, or rather, an identity disorder, only in the course of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was homosexuality removed from the main lists of psychiatric illnesses, where the condition of transgender is still present. And if in the 1980s the ferocious reaction by mass media to the outburst of the AIDS epidemic reminded gay and bisexual men and transgender women of their infamy, from the 20<sup>th</sup> century to today, civil rights movements have succeeded in turning shame into pride.

Even in catholic Italy, same-sex couples, although they cannot marry, have been recently recognised by the law. And several court rulings have attributed parental responsibility over children to both partners. If under Fascism, anyone tarnished by the unnameable vice was exiled, today gays and lesbians can fully participate in the life of the country, contribute to the production and reproduction of society. The former above all have become representatives of an accomplished, laic, healthy, white-skinned, personable modernity, associated in a fashionable city like Milan, with design, the theatre, the arts. A bastion of culture and civilisation against barbarity.

During the AIDS crisis, the patchwork of clothes by Ruben Montini would have evoked the Memorial Quilt, the tinkling of the bells hanging from the clothes the cursed figure of the plague-spreader. Today is perhaps that sound a festive symbol, a celebration of the magnificent and progressive destinies of humanity? Invited to distance himself from the great eternal body of the Nation, the visitor enters an intimate space, bounded by the remains of the artist's mortal body. Here, progress is suspended, time stops, oscillates, curves into itself – becoming twisted and odd, literally queer. Reclaiming the female art of embroidery, a young homosexual man questions his belonging to the male gender, abdicating the mental sanity so recently conquered. The gay champion of modernity returns to being the faggot (frocio) that he has always also been.

In too many countries of the world, sodomy is banned and punished by jail or even death. Russian law against gay propaganda, the attempt to introduce capital punishment in Uganda, the massacre in Orlando, the detention camps for homosexuals in Chechnya are demonstrations of how every step forward in the social recognition of sexual minorities produces dramatic recoils. Not even the countries retained more advanced are foreign to outbursts of homo/trans/biphobia: just think of the over-20-year-old catholic campaign against the so-called “theory of gender”, and to how many acts of bullying and cyber-bullying, aggressions, suicides of homosexual, bisexual and transgender youths still fill daily newspapers.

«The attempt to redeem sex against nature through that heterosexual institution that is the fertile couple is actually rather recent», we can answer. «We must give it time and work together. Foster hope for future success». «The values of liberal civilisation will prevail: in the globalised, westernised world, gays and lesbians, their families, their children, will finally attain a place of honour».

In time suspended in Montini's wardrobe, amidst the tinkling of bells, a different truth seems to make its way. For a moment, or for an entire lifetime, it is possible to resist the social imperatives that want us in love, integrated, productive, happy – successful husbands, fathers, professionals, artists. It is possible to abstain from the extenuating race towards a future of equality (toward the better?). To flee from the suffocating embrace of Humanity. To mockingly agree with Kant, instead, to choose disgust over condemnation, degradation over suicide. To embrace our failures, our inhuman, animal, less-than-animal difference. Together, one by one. Alone. Like when we are born, we enjoy, and we die.

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