The Ontopolitics of Gender as Transindividual Relation

Samuel Berlin and Sage Brice

Introduction

In this chapter, we will argue that within a Deleuzo-Guattarian ontology of bodies, gendered difference does not appear as the fixed property of a body but exists instead within and through a body's relations.[1] This assertion is important because cisnormative (or trans-exclusive) logics of sex and gender presuppose and demand fixity: it is only by pinning down the meaning of a body that that body can become recognized as a person, since all persons are by default required to be gendered subjects.

Treating gender as pure relation, however, creates new problems. If, on the one hand, gender is strictly relational, then common understandings of transgender as an expression of originary or innate gender identity become difficult to maintain. Rejecting the terms of trans[2] self-identification, on the other hand, risks acquiescing to cisnormative territorializations, that is, the imposition of cisnormative gender relations that induce dysphoria and discrimination. These territorializations are destructive to trans bodies and lives, as individual agency becomes subordinated to a contested public consensus over who trans people 'really' are. Making too quick a shift to a notionally horizontal, undifferentiated relationality ignores the fact that all difference is not created equal.

Our use of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts to understand trans difference therefore resists readings of their work (Deleuze, 1988, 2004a, 2004b; Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a, 2004b) as advancing a simplistically anti-normative position. Instead, it makes a claim on difference as the driver of existence and on the full diversity of transgender articulations and expressions as engendering a new and different kind of gender politics. Our argument here parallels one advanced by Andrea Long Chu (2019) in her caution against investing too single-mindedly in the politics of self-identification. As Chu notes, taking on a gendered embodiment other than the one assigned at birth is not merely a matter of self-acceptance and self-understanding, or even self-expression, but rather a demand made on the world in order to create the necessary conditions for enacting gender differently. Chu (2019, 38) argues - contentiously - that "gender transition begins […] from the understanding that how you identify yourself subjectively—as precious and important as this identification may be—is nevertheless on its own basically worthless." Her point here is to underline the self-evident, but often disregarded truism that if transition were purely a matter of self identification, then it would be enough to merely think it in order for it to be accomplished. Self-identity, however, inevitably runs up against the limits of a world that sometimes refuses accommodation. The stakes of expressing an identity are, in fact, bound up with ensuring that the world participates in its formation. Thus Chu continues:

> [I]f there is any lesson of gender transition—from the simplest request regarding pronouns to the most invasive surgeries—it's that gender is something other people have to give you. Gender exists, if it is to exist at all, only in the structural generosity of strangers. When people today say that a given gender identity is "valid," this is true, but only tautologically so. At best it is a moral demand for possibility, but it does not,

in itself, constitute the realization of this possibility. The truth is, you are not the central transit hub for meaning about yourself, and you probably don't even have a right to be. You do not get to consent to yourself, even if you might deserve the chance.

(Chu, 2019, 38)

Transitioning, then, is more than simply the realization of a pre-given, internal truth. It is a political act aimed at transforming not only the self but also the milieu. Treating gender as a relation in this sense is a recognition of the impossibility of separating gendered embodiment from the milieus within which it emerges – milieus that are frequently overdetermined by transphobia and misogyny. Ontological questions *about* gender are thus not only inseparable from the politics of gender, but are in fact synonymous with it. It is this observation which leads us to engage with the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari to develop an ontopolitics of gender.

Our interest here is not to present a perfect alternative system of thought for theorising sex, gender and change through Deleuze. Rather, it is to ask what Deleuze can offer us in thinking about transness by providing an alternative to substantialist models of body and selfhood which still dominate conversations about gender and sex on all sides. Instead of exalting events of resistance that mark waypoints on a progressive telos, in the works of Deleuze and Guattari we find a more finely-grained concern with the textures of life in which everyday acts of living (and conative action in pursuit of life and its flourishing) result in the formation of new kinds of relation that produce change. Deleuze and Guattari (2004b) while they reject the notion of the body as an organism with fixed properties and characteristics, nevertheless situate the body's emergence in the tension between ordered social stratifications and indeterminate relations between transversal forces:

We are in a social formation; first see how it is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are; then descend from the strata to the deeper assemblage within which we are held; gently tip the assemblage, making it pass over to the side of the plane of consistency. It is only here that the Body-without-Organs reveals itself for what it is: connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b, 176-7)

This networked vision of change and of life is necessary in order to understand how many trans and, for that matter, cis people experience both their own, individual genders and gender as a phenomenon.[3]

A networked, fine-grained, molecular vision of gender identity and of the trajectories of change implied by 'transition' indicates a need to reconsider the function of norms in producing gender. In this chapter we argue that norms are more than just conservative and territorialising structures that inhibit transformation and the thriving of difference. Norms are also the conditions within which difference emerges. With this in mind, the chapter brings together Deleuze and Guattari with the work of Judith Butler[4] ([1990] 2006, [1993] 2011, 2015) to argue that a simplistically anti-normative politics is not sufficient to account for, or to accommodate, the diversity of trans articulations of gender and sex, nor to adequately express the powerfully liberatory impetus that these articulations potentialize. What Butler's work highlights, in parallel to Deleuze and Guattari, is the importance of *processes* of performative becoming. Performance is the stuff of life itself. It is this

performative becoming which allows bodies to expand away from the maladies of their current relations and strive to continue in existence—to persist by changing. To use Spinoza's ([1675] 1996) terminology, the becoming of bodies is their *conatus*.

The conatus translates into an ethical demand upon bodies to *become* differently in order to maximize their vitality (Deleuze, 1988; Sharp, 2011). That is to say, it is an imperative to strive towards more concordant relations that amplify the capacity for life and relation. For trans people, this typically means escaping the gender dissonance of dysphoria and transphobia by transitioning to more viable embodiments.[5] But bodies and genders do not exist alone; they exist always in relation (Brice, 2020). In this way, there is always a politics to the ethical demands of the conatus: to pursue forms of sociality in which norms do not prevent the flourishing of gendered bodies but provide a scaffolding for gendered becoming. Transitioning is about transforming not only the body, but also the world in which bodies come to matter.

This chapter will begin by examining the limits of trans, or indeed any, self-identification as a political and self-subjectivising act due to the relational nature of the self. It will then argue that a reductively anti-binary or anti-normative politics fails to recognize both the impossibility of normlessness and the fact that norms are not only oppressive but also productive for both cis and trans genders. To better understand the relationality of the self that underlies this recognition of the willing self's limits, we turn to the writings of Deleuze and Guattari to show how bodies and selves are necessarily relational and multipolar. The ontology we present indicates another kind of trans politics beyond battles of meaning with predetermined ends. Instead, we argue for an emergent, situated, everyday trans politics that affirms vitality rather than just opposition. We conclude by arguing that this kind of vital politics, which works not just against but also with the power of the normative, represents one facet of a budding trans theory that takes the body seriously in ways that queer theory has struggled to do.

"You'll want to lose the beard"

Sage: *The first thing they said to me at the Gender Identity Clinic was "you'll want to lose the beard."*

So, here's the thing. I quite liked my beard. It was cute and, in a strange way, quite feminine, I thought. If I looked more recognisably feminine (by which I mean, mostly, if I was able to grow my hair long and thick, and had more patience with makeup), I might have even entertained the possibility of keeping it. As it was, I did reflect long and hard before beginning the painful and costly process of permanently removing my facial hair. Despite the unsolicited advice I received on my visit to the clinic, I was fully cognisant that there is no earthly reason why a woman couldn't, or shouldn't, have a beard (though I lacked role models at the time, a number of strikingly beautiful transfeminine people with beards have since gained public visibility, affirming a vision that had long appealed to me).

I don't regret my choices and don't anticipate that I ever will. For me, the beard was too firmly attached to a sense of obligatory masculinity which I did not want to sustain. It was also too much of a barrier to being perceived, and related to, as a woman in my day-to-day interactions. Which for me is precisely the point. Trans bodily practices do not exist independently of societal relations, but nor are they fully determined by societal norms. The idea of an 'authentic' self-expression has no meaning outside of relational context, because we form a sense of self only in relation with others. Thus the decision whether or not to 'lose'

my beard isn't just a question of how I want to look, or what I want that look to say about me, or even which norms I wish to subvert or uphold – but of what kinds of relationships and interactions I want to have with other people.

I chose not to have a beard primarily because I wanted to open myself up the experience of being related to <u>as a woman</u> by other people, including strangers and new acquaintances, without the always-attendant qualifier, 'trans' – or rather, without first having to correct the category error, 'man'. This decision was not about being accepted, validated, or recognized as a 'legitimate' woman according to normative parameters, but about accessing a more congruous sense of myself through the embodied practice of living and relating with others in as uncomplicated as possible a manner as a woman.

The relationality of gender is perhaps most visible in the circulation of norms, in the moments of discipline and surveillance that threaten the work we do to pursue what makes our bodies and our lives liveable. The unsolicited advice about a beard, recounted above, came from a volunteer 'greeter' at the Gender Clinic. Sage was (and at time of publication, in all likelihood still is) years away from an actual diagnostic appointment with an NHS specialist.[6] Though the advice came from an untrained volunteer, it is typical of the patterns and problems that characterize trans experiences, both within the medical system and in how the daily choices they/we must make about how their/our bodies are framed. An extreme deficit of provision for gender-affirming health care, and the dependency upon informal avenues of support which this deficiency engenders, are part and parcel of the current hostile environment to transition in the UK.

Opposition to gender-affirming health care, especially for young people, often hinges upon fears for their hypothetical future regret (Pearce, 2018). When trans people manage to overcome the many obstacles to accessing gender-affirming treatment, patient satisfaction rates for trans healthcare are consistently and unusually high compared to other parts of the healthcare system (Mayer et al., 2019; Davies et al., 2013; Bockting et al., 2004). The public fantasy that gender-variant people will be 'pressured' by the medical industry and/or 'progressive' liberal discourse to conform with a teleological and binary ideology of gender, however, is persistent.[7] Following this rationale, barriers to trans recognition and acceptance are viewed as necessary 'checks' to an imagined inexorable and unidirectional flow towards medicalized gender transition, in order to prevent hypothetical future regrets (Pearce, Erikainen and Vincent, 2020).

<u>Friction</u>

Sage: *I have regrets, but not those regrets. While I don't regret losing my facial hair, I do regret even seeming to accommodate a world that sees fit to require it of me. And it troubles me that I can easily imagine someone else in my position taking the same actions I did, but living to regret it. And so, although I don't have those regrets, it still concerns me that I easily could have had them. How can I or anyone ever know, really, what choices they might have made about their bodies in a world which didn't attempt to categorize them according to these particular binary constraints, imposed in these specific modes?*

I didn't hate my beard. What I absolutely hated (and still struggle with) is shaving. Shaving requires spending time closely observing my face in a mirror. It requires starting each and every day with intimate, tactile, sometimes painful interaction with what I least like about myself. Again, it's not the beard I mind, it's the bare fact that my body is determined to produce it. Left unchecked, it will continue relentlessly producing thick, dark hairs on parts of my face

where they would not normally grow, absent the effects of testosterone poisoning - of which they are a painful and persistent reminder. For much of my adult life I settled instead on a short beard, which was preferable to a clean-shaved face simply because it was 'low friction', that is to say, it required the minimum of dysphoria-inducing maintenance.

Public discussions about trans regret largely miss the point that trans struggles frequently have less to do with the nature of our identities than with the forms of resistance and friction we encounter – both in the dissonance we may experience with our own bodies and from the societies we live in. What these debates fail to recognize is that barriers to accessing healthcare in fact force trans and nonbinary people to formulate and adhere to narrower and more fixed ideas of trans genders and selfhood than trans people might otherwise feel free to articulate – as, for example, when transfeminine people are pressured to shave in order to satisfy a specialist's expectation that trans people will identify consistently with the 'opposite' sex. In Sage's case, shaving was a far more dysphoric activity than simply having a beard, but the latter was less compatible with a desire for congruent relations with a milieu that is tuned to particular gendered expectations. Dysphoria is here experienced as a friction – the daily friction of shaving and the social friction of knocking up against a normative presumption that expects or even demands it. The moves Sage makes are not oriented towards or away from governing norms, but towards reducing friction, that is, towards creating the conditions in which to thrive relatively unimpeded. Norms, as such, are sometimes crucial and sometimes incidental to that process, but there is no straightforward linear relationship between transition choices and normative expectations.

The severe gatekeeping and extensive delays that trans people must overcome to access gender-affirming healthcare or legal recognition, especially in the UK and other gender-sceptical countries, mean that trans people cannot afford to harbour much doubt, uncertainty, or experimentation. Medicalized transition and legal recognition goals become, of necessity, over-invested objects of desire precisely because they are unobtainable without the heavy investment of desire and determination. This is not to imply that this desire stems solely from a medical or legal imperative. What it does suggest, however, is that the very atmosphere of hostility which is intended to mitigate the perceived dangers of a prescriptive pathway to transition has just the opposite effect. It forces trans people to hone and concretize desires, to take up and defend as coherent and consistent a position as possible regarding envisioned future selves. In other words, trans people are forced to cultivate exaggerated narratives of self-identity (where self-identity means the coherence of an entity with itself) in order to access the conditions which will enable achieving a liveable level of congruity. This is the reality which has given rise to so much tension around the historic figure of the transsexual (Stone, 1992), but we propose a different approach to thinking about this problem; one which does not centre conformity as its primary metric. For trans people, creating a liveable body is not just an exercise in overcoming traumatic histories and ongoing misgenderings in pursuit of a consistent, harmonious relationship between body and mind. The conditions in which such a relation can occur are themselves shaped within gender normativity. The example of medicalized transness is at an extreme end of this problem, but this is a matter of degree, not kind. Like most of life, trans desire cannot be easily separated from the constellations of relations that we think of as gender norms or cisnormative culture.

Gender self-identity as a condition of political subjecthood

"Trans women are women!"

"Trans men are men!"

"Nonbinary people are valid!"

In a context of increasingly virulent transphobia in the United Kingdom and worldwide, assertions like these have become a commonplace of progressive discourse, scrawled on placards and echoing through streets as trans people and cis allies demand an equitable standard of recognition and inclusion. These pronouncements offer hearty defiance to cisnormative ideas about what bodies *mean* and, more fundamentally, what they *are.* In declaring that "trans women are women," "trans men are men," and "nonbinary people are valid," trans people and allies (and the speakers are very often allies) refuse the terms of the scientistic 'common sense' that individual identity equates with sex assigned at birth. Their refusal operates by prioritising self-identification over externally imposed classificatory regimes, resisting the automatic classification of people into sexed categories according to primary and secondary sex characteristics. The terms of this battle are drawn at the site of *identity*: that is, the location of events within which bodies become politically meaningful, which forms the basis of debates about how trans bodies are to be recognised and governed (Butler, 2015, p. 19).

Many trans commentators, however, have taken issue with the logic of statements like "trans women are women" (see e.g. Burns, 2020). As a mantra of primarily cis allies, this kind of discourse reproduces gender as a product of cisgender consensus. It also does little to disrupt the exclusions of binary gender beyond widening the male/female binary, leaving its heteronormativity, coloniality, racial inequities and exclusion of intersex and nonbinary people intact (Gill-Peterson, 2014). Thinking beyond the tactical questions of what statements like "trans men are men" can achieve, commentators such as Chu (2019) take umbrage with the facticity of stating that trans people are unproblematically members of the genders they identify with. The target of Chu's critique is the very logic of self-identity inherent to this kind of sloganeering and to mainstream contemporary trans politics more broadly. The logic of self-identity is a tactic aimed at countering the constraints imposed upon self-identity, but it is also limited by these constraints. Self-identification can never be fully successful, because meaning-making about a self is a collective activity. This is the power of norms. As per Chu's observations quoted above, we wish to argue in this chapter for the limits of the performative in trans politics.

We adopt the term *performative* here in full appreciation of its divergent usages and meanings. In literature on gender, performativity generally refers to a set of theories about identity and embodiment vis-à-vis discourse developed by Butler ([1990] 2006, [1993] 2011). Butler asserts that it is through discourse that bodies literally come to matter; that the material exists to us as humans precisely because of the processes that make it meaningful. Although there is debate about the specifics of these processes (Nelson, 1999; Hughes and Witz, 1997; Charnes, 1996), as well as significant criticism of the misuse of Butler's work to argue that discourse and matter are equal, we understand Butler to argue for a theory of the material that refuses a clean distinction between epistemology and ontology (Meijer and Prins, 1998). Instead of focusing on the reality or truth of matter, performativity here shifts the focus to how matter comes to matter, to be important, to be felt and to be meaningful. Butler's use of the term implies that it is in how bodies and the material are inhabited and lived dialogically that authenticity, stability and meaningfulness come to be.

The second, popular use of *performativity* is not independent of Butler's formulation, but it takes on a somewhat opposite meaning. In everyday usage, performance implies inauthenticity, instability and experimentation. Butler, who has made heavy use of tropes of gender experimentation

from drag and trans embodiment (Namaste, 2009), has had to address this slippage directly in light of its mobilization by anti-trans writers who have focused on the connotations of gender inauthenticity that emerge from shallow readings of their work (Williams, 2014). But it has also formed an important locus of queer boundary-pushing in the fight against oppressive sexual and gendered norms. It is these norms, however, that form the core of Chu's critique. It is not just that the 1990s obsession with gender experimentation in queer theory and queer subcultures sometimes clashes with trans understandings of the relationship between bodies and identities, which can, but do not necessarily, emphasize transgression or valorize distance from norms. The point is also that norms are not simply externally imposed but emerge in a process that includes and enables negotiation, iteration and subversion. Merely experimenting with performing identity *differently* is not a sufficient strategy for escaping the codification of the body along the lines of cisnormative gender. Keeping the beard would have been a valid choice, but not a straightforwardly liberatory one*.* By virtue of its sexed and gendered codification, the presence (or absence) of a beard affects access to different qualities and configurations of encounters, embodiments and experiences, which give rise to different senses of relational becoming in the world. Gender does not belong to any one gendered subject, the same way that the body does not belong to any one sovereign, thinking individual (Massumi, 2015; Colls 2012). The gender of a gendered subject is indissociable from their location in material-social worlds that make gender possible. These too are the same worlds that make their bodies, and all bodies, possible.

This relational dynamic comes to the fore in Deleuzian theories of difference: "it is not difference which presupposes opposition but opposition which presupposes difference" (Deleuze, 2004a, 62). If difference is ontological, then the homogeneity of identity in popular discourse can only be understood as a papering-over of that difference. Oppositional homogenization territorializes and negates the originary difference of life itself, of which trans genders are an expression. A trans ontopolitics, by contrast, makes it possible to affirm the importance of originary identity in terms that operate outside of the body-society opposition. As we will show, this produces a transformational politics of vitality, rather than simply acquiescence or resistance to gendered norms.

It would be easy to interpret the de-territorialising imperatives in Deleuze and Guattari's (2004a, 2004b) work (the rhizome; the body-without-organs; becoming-minor) as espousing a simple formula in which evasion or transgression of social norms equates with a move towards freedom from the fascism of fixed states. On this model, a host of new norms might be produced in which, for example, 'binary' trans identities are read as reinscribing hegemonic gender norms, while 'nonbinary' identities refuse them. And indeed, for those who have felt constrained by historically narrow delineations of transness or transsexuality, this model has proven useful for articulating anti-prescriptive positions on trans identity (see for example Crawford, 2008).

Our aim here is not to reject this liberating impetus of gender evasion and transgression as tactics, nor indeed to deny the importance of that impetus within Deleuze and Guattari's project. It is to affirm that there is more to de-territorialization than simple opposition. What we see as the important contribution of Deleuze and Guattari's work, for our purposes, is the idea of an excess outside of the restricted logic of imposition and opposition to societal norms (Colebrook, 2014). This is a contribution that unsettles ideas of continuity as a basis of identity or individual existence. At the same time, it seems unwise to disregard the detailed and sophisticated labour and attention that trans and nonbinary people, both individually and collectively, dedicate to interrogating and exploring individual trans relationships with gender. Successive generations of trans people have found that narratives of continuity (that is, of an enduring gender identity) provide significant fit with their lived

experiences and explanatory power with which to make sense of them. Allowing for the possibility that normative forces within public and medical discourses may exert a pressure on trans people to organize their/our life narratives within just such a framework of continuity, it is nevertheless clear that tracing a thread of continuity through individual lived experience plays a genuine and important role for trans people in recuperating what can often be highly fractured and deeply alienated lives.

This belies the argument that early trans theorists such as Sandy Stone (1992) initially mobilized against the normative figure of the transsexual. Indeed, the narratives of continuity which trans and nonbinary people actually put forward do not necessarily resemble the kind of fixed, binary, teleological and medicalized narratives evoked by that historic figure. A genderfluid individual, for example, may experience the condition of fluidity itself as a consistent mode of difference from the cisgender condition of fixity. Similarly, a trans person who tends towards a binary gender may also experience, in the course of transition, a newfound ability to explore gender expressions traditionally associated with the gender they were assigned at birth. This shift becomes possible *because* these expressions no longer have the power to invoke a sense of incongruence triggered by the condition of being chronically misgendered. Continuity need not therefore correlate with either fixity or conformity.

The proliferation and enthusiastic adoption of identity labels such as agender and genderfluid, and of gender-subversive forms of trans masculinity and femininity, demonstrate that refusals of the binary and appeals to fluidity or change are not necessarily experienced by trans people as antithetical to the sense of an enduring, specific orientation within and towards the field of possible gendered and gendering societal relations (Primo, Zamperini and Testoni, 2020). What the diversity of trans articulations and expressions of gender demonstrates, then, is that trans experience cannot be fully accounted for without allowing for *both* 1) some as-yet-undefined concept of continuity or 'inherent' identity *and* 2) an ontological refusal of fixed categories of being.

A critical site for the integration of these two seemingly opposing tenets is the body. An important impetus of queer theory has historically been an attempt to escape, or at least to fuck with, the confines of the body as inscribed by conservative appeals to 'nature', including sex-essentialist iterations of feminism. Trans articulations of identity, by contrast, insist on bringing the body back into the picture, but without a reversion to sex-essentialist formulations of identity, or to a naturalization of the body as ontologically prior to discourse. What trans experience underscores is the inadequacy of any attempt to parse body and mind, or nature and culture, as separate and independent fields that might act one upon the other, regardless of the presumed directionality of that relationship. To interpret any act of gender embodiment, expression, presentation, or articulation as belonging entirely to one realm or the other is too simplistic and relies on superficial characterizations of transness that are rarely born out in practice (Brice, in press; Primo, Zamperini and Testoni, 2020).

This problem – the inseparability of body from mind or nature from culture – harks back to Butler's ([1993] 2011) critique of the classic opposition between constructivist and essentialist theories of gender: namely, that strict linguistic constructivism necessarily presupposes an underlying 'nature' that somehow exists outside of cultural construction and which cultural construction acts 'upon'. Butler's theory of performativity demonstrates that norms are not so much imposed *upon* a pre-existing body as they are iteratively called into being through the embodied and discursive performance of everyday life. Butler therefore figures the prescriptive normativity of gender and the conditions of possibility for its subversive transformation as intimately related, and as situated in

precisely the same generative space. This amounts to a refusal of the distinction between epistemological and ontological regimes of knowledge, since existence becomes not so much a *condition* as a *product* of always-ongoing discursive and material processes (Meijer and Prins, 1998).

The persistent preoccupation with the body/mind question as a basis for theorising sex and gender identity arises from an ontological fixation with the subject, treating identity as a characteristic attached (or not attached) to individual bodies, rather than a collective problem or field of possibility (Brice 2020). Butler's refusal to separate out epistemology from ontology begins to address this problem, and in doing so gestures towards what we are here calling an ontopolitics: a politics sited in the generative space of continual processes of worlding or becoming. However, because Butler stops short of engaging the kind of process ontologies which inform Deleuze and Guattari's work,[8] Butler's critique continues to prioritize discursive over bodily and affective registers. This has made it too easy for some queer theorists to skirt over questions of nature and the body, thereby inadvertently conceding the territory of the body to biologically essentialist forms of 'gender-critical' and feminist thought.

Beyond anti-normativity

Deleuze offers new ways to think about norms and liveability without positing a naïve anti-normativity in its stead (Colebrook 2014). Deleuze does this by questioning who the subject of norms *is*. The queer focus on norms generally assumes that norms are subjectivating and that an anti-normative politics would produce more liveable forms of subjecthood beyond their limits. However, queer theory has grappled much less extensively with the impossibility of the non-normative (Mahmood, 2005) and has, as a result, risked embedding new norms in place of those it deems anti-queer (Serano, 2007).

Like Butler's, Deleuze and Guattari's work is frequently caricatured as anti-normative and focused on practice alone.[9] However, while Butler conceptualizes practice in terms of meaning vis-à-vis discourse, in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari signification is but one part of a constellation of active relations and forces. The difference here may be one of emphasis, but its implications are far-reaching, as we can see in the queer literature that emerged from Butler's work, which emphasizes individualized discursive action over the networking of relation and meaning over the force of matter. Butler's argument that matter comes to matter precisely through the processes in which it becomes knowable represent a latent humanism (Charnes, 1996) that Deleuzian theories of matter, by removing the need for an observing subject of the material, are able to do without. This is the difference that Hallward (2000), in his work on Deleuze and Foucault, identifies with the distinction between the *singular* and the specific. Where humanist thinkers propose difference as emerging through networks of relations that are fundamentally rooted in knowledge, for Deleuze, it is relations of bare existence that produce difference (2004a). That is to say, difference is itself ontological. Like Butler, Deleuze and Guattari propose a relational ontology of bodies, but where Butler emphasizes knowledge, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize force, speed and capacity, all explicitly detached from the demand for a sensing and understanding mind or self. This non- or post-humanist turn is helpful for addressing the body in a way that does not centre discourse or create a hierarchy of relation within bodies.

Gender as relation, gender as process

Thinking through the body, taking Deleuze and Guattari as our starting point, would look something like this:

First, a body is not synonymous with an organic whole. In fact, for Deleuze and Guattari, all sorts of things are bodies which are not necessarily human or even organic. Bodies come into being as a result of their affects, that is, their relations, or the desires that produce those relations. Thus, bodies start from a position of mutuality and of change: "a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality" (Deleuze, 1988, 123). Relations are always shifting as bodies change and move. It therefore makes little sense to think of a human body in terms of its stability and unity, since our bodies are always becoming in relation to their environments and the assemblages which they become part of and with (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b; Massumi, 2002). This relational schema does not just extend bodies into what we normally think of as their excess, but also demands rethinking the hierarchies that typify imaginaries of bodily 'interiors' as well.

Rather than placing the mind at the seat of control over a compliant body, the body is understood as operating in parallel to the mind; a multipolar assemblage of relations between bodies: "each body in extension, each idea or each mind in thought are constituted by the characteristic relations that subsume the parts of that body, the parts of that idea" (Deleuze, 1988, 19).[10] As Deleuze and Guattari show in their theorization of the body without organs (Deleuze, 2004b; Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b), these relations are territorialising for the individual becomings of the different bodies, or aspects, that make up the 'interiority' of a human being. They hold each other in check. If bodies are typified by their affects, they become congruent with their functions, but because these functions occur in relation, there is no pure potentiality. The stomach is an eating machine, the throat a swallowing machine, the stomach and intestines digesting machines (Buchanan, 1997). One cannot eat more than the stomach can hold (at least not without threatening the vitality of the stomach); the tendencies and potentialities of the throat are shaped by its relation to the stomach.

As Deleuze and Guattari (2004b; 178-179) warn of the body without organs in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the possibility of pure becoming – the dream of absolute liberation – can never be fully pursued because it would damage the conatus, or the viability of life: "you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality." Here we start to see the parallels to trans embodiment. Queer theory has emphasized forms of antinormativity (Wiegman and Wilson, 2015) that resemble what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as deterritorialization, or 'lines of flight' away from capture by the overdetermined collections of forces that produce an illusion of hegemony. In contrast, a Deleuzian queer theory (Colebrook, 2009), like our nascent trans theory, pushes back against this simplistic schema. While it is one thing to recognize the dominance of homologous gender and sex binaries as destructive, it is another to produce spaces to thrive from within their overdetermination. Rather than just working to carve out space beyond the binary (though this is the goal for many,) for some trans people the goal is to create a liveable space *within* prevalent binary mappings of gender.[11] This may sometimes look like pursuing a 'passing' embodiment, but even for those who do not pass or do not desire to, being able to inhabit pre-existing locations on the gender binary is often important, even if it means inhabiting these spaces differently than cis people might.

The pursuit of a habitable space within existing orders of gendered possibility cannot be characterized as simple pragmatism, and still less as a reformist vision of gender, which would demand conceptualising (trans) genders as only ever 'authentic' when they deny the strictures of the binary. Such a position conceives trans authenticity as necessarily oppositional and defined by its negative relation to cisnormative gender and sex. However, there is little reason to prioritize a presumptive

gender authenticity that supposes a 'deep', originary self which meaningfully pre-exists gender normativity. In other words, gender normativity does not just provide the scaffolding on which decisions about how to live gender 'otherwise' are made and actualized. Indeed, there would be no possibility of an 'otherwise' if there were no norms. As a dominating striation that permeates social space, gender normativity is also inevitably present precisely at the moments in which bodies come into relation with themselves. These are not only the moments when dysphorias emerge as bodies brush up against organizing norms. They are also the moments when possibilities are found or created for more congruous relations of becoming. The relational encounter produces much more than oppression and discongruence, but is a key locus for generating new vitalities.

Normativity and the power of enabling constraints

Sage: *When I talk about friction, what I mean is the ways in which I rub up uncomfortably against the distressing and negative aspects of being trans in day-to-day life. 'Friction' can be triggers for dysphoria – such as shaving or being misgendered – or instances of transphobia – such as hostility, discrimination, or exclusion. Transition choices are largely about reducing friction (or, more affirmatively, about generating euphoria). The point is that I make these choices not as a fully volitional and independent actor seeking to effectively express an authentic self, but as a being trying to find spaces to thrive in relation; to create the conditions in which I can become somebody I am happier being.*

Here we should emphasize that normativity arrives not as an ideology but as a chorus of relational possibilities and constraints – or histories, actual and potential – acting in concert. The stares, the comments, the harassment, the dysphoria, the violence: singular events add up to wear away and to prevent thriving in such a similarly overdetermined way as to impress a unity of purpose onto the social and to produce a reactive image of self. Growing or removing a beard is one way of curating that stream of events. Though the presence of normative constraints is destructive for trans people (as well as for most cis people, we would add), it is generative too. How could it not be? Pure destruction would leave none of us standing in the end. This is self-evidently true for people identifying on the binary, whose genders are openly and indissociably tied to gender norms. It is, however, also true for people who position themselves outside the binary, because gender is still a productive force that compels gender transgression. Androgyny may react against binary gender, but it still exists in relation to it. Furthermore, nonbinary people frequently explore the limits of masculinity and femininity, rearticulating and expanding what these terms mean. To nonbinary people, limiting norms also become fields of potential from which new gender articulations can be produced.[12] It is not just that gender normativity compels a reaction; it is also that this reaction is not purely negative, but is also subjectivating in a positive sense (Colebrook, 2009).[13] To put this simply, the idea that the binary obscures the true self elides the fact that a self can only exist in relation to norms, which are currently overwhelmingly orientated to the binary.

A process ontology approach to norms describes the emergence of difference without tethering it to oppositional reference points. This does not mean that external referents are irrelevant. It means that these referents cannot be presumed to have effects (as ideologies) but must be accounted for through processes of relation (affect), sensibility (logic) and repetition that mould but do not fully determine difference (Massumi, 2015). Deleuzian process ontology can help delineate a trans politics that avoids the elisions produced when conceptualising gender as either solely originary

(an innate identity or aspect of a self) or as something inscribed onto a body from the 'outside' world or a sovereign mind (imposed on children at birth and through socialization or reworked through acts of resistance and discovery). Like Butler, Deleuze and Guattari understand not just the subjective or social as networked and relational, but also the physical, material and embodied. Unlike Butler, however, Deleuze and Guattari do not prioritize a human subject in their depiction of the social and its emergence (Colebrook, 2009) and thus do not limit the scope of enquiry to discourse or communication. Usefully, this posthumanism and its associated materialism bypass some of the problems that are associated with Butlerian theory and gender. In particular, by deemphasising meaning, it counters the transphobic critique that theories of performance neglect the nature or agency of the sexed body in favour of a sovereign, masculinist mind (Berlin, 2015).

Rather than positing a transcendent and essential truth of the body, Deleuzian process ontology emphasizes the contingency of both subjectivites and embodied forms as conjunctions of relations that do not evidence a broader ideal (for example, of gender). Things (people, objects, ideas, singularities, flows, *noumena, agencements*) can only be explained within transversal histories (Sauvagnargues, 2016) and possibilities engendered by their actual and potential conditions and *not* as representations of ideal forms. The linguistic and symbolic are important constituents of these conditions, but the conditions within which phenomena emerge cannot be reduced to effects of discourse, nor can discourse be understood as transcendent to the conditions within which it is enacted. Gender, then, is both indissociable from its real embodiment and, as a general ideal, insufficient to explain how it is lived in specific assemblages. Shifting priority from a transcendent ideal to singular instances does not mean reifying individual experience, however. The experiencing individual can also only exist contingently and within the assemblages in which they are produced.

The ontological implications of Deleuzian transcendental empiricism for thinking about gender and identity parallel Chu's critique of identity, mentioned above. Chu insists that an individual cannot simply identify with a gender and will it into the world, because the gender of an individual is necessarily of the world and not just a willing subject. Transphobes, it would seem, are not wrong about everything. Though their anger about self-identification may serve primarily as an excuse for bigotry, in the course of enacting the problem of self-identification it also reveals self-identification's limits. In the transphobic and cisnormative refusal to accept trans self-identification, transphobes stake a claim on how gendered embodiments emerge and are lived. What is important, then, is not just to counter transphobic and cisnormative misrecognitions and normativities, but also to rework the assemblages amidst which gendered embodiments emerge in order to create safer, more agreeable conditions in which trans people can thrive. This indicates a politics that pursues making the coincidence of trans embodiments and identities more liveable not as an insistence upon the reality or validity of trans identities but by pursuing the conditions that would allow for trans identities to be fully realized. A trans ontopolitics, then, must establish new assemblages in which gender can *become* differently.

The problem then is how to bring together these kinds of assemblages that would allow for healthier and more vibrant trans becomings. Gender is not a transcendent ideal but a non-exhaustive and locally specific assemblage of ideas, discourses, expectations and norms – and the infrastructures and affects that these entail. As a constituent of the assemblages within which trans subjects emerge, the effects of normative, binary gender on trans bodies cannot be reduced solely to the deleterious; to how gender oppresses and represses. Trans genders exist both *in spite of* and *in relation to* the binary. Abolishing gender, whatever that would look like, would revolutionize cis genders for sure, but

it would also untether trans genders both from the relations and forces that repress them *and* from those that are productive for them. Put bluntly: it is not necessarily a desirable outcome that trans genders cease to exist.

For this reason, the goal cannot be simply to create lines of flight – deterritorializations – away from gender normativity. What Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the body without organs, that is, the plane of pure, deterritorialized possibility, serves as a generative limit for fleeing the unproductive stasis of Being and reductive meaning. As we have noted, pure becoming also brings its own dangers. For both gender 'rebels' and transsexual people accused of perpetuating cisnormative binary gender, normative gender is an important constituent of the assemblages in which their trans embodiments emerge. The political imperative that results from this recognition cannot be to pursue pure deterritorialization through gender abolition. Where lines of flight (trajectories of deterritorialization) end, fail and are reterritorialized, the reimposition of cisnormativity is not just destructive but also creative for trans becomings. Rather than singular moments of revolution, these smaller pursuits of an 'otherwise' to cisnormativity, which differ from cisnormative repetitions of gender norms in quality and intensity rather than kind (Colebrook, 2009), can help shift gender norms towards more open and productive domains in which a multiplicity of genders can thrive.

Conclusion: creating conditions for thriving

The 'otherwise' that we are theorising forms part of a larger concern with imagining a new trans politics and the production of images of thought in service of this project. The theoretical potential of trans does not lie solely in the power of transness to upset dualisms and transgress or transcend boundaries (beneficial as this power might be). As Chu and Harsin Drager (2019) put it, theorising from a trans perspective – the production of a "trans theory" – should not mean building "queering's unasked-for sequel" (105). Specifically, an ideal of transgressive transness should not be mobilized as a vehicle for newly prescriptive and programmatic concepts of gender abolition. Rather, trans theory offers the opportunity to approach gender and subjectivity as collective problems and not individual characteristics.

The emphasis thereby shifts from questions of how identities cleave to bodies to the matter of what social and relational conditions enable a multiplicity of bodies to thrive. Contrary to the concerns of some transphobic feminists, such a trans theory *will be* predicated on an attention to the body as a site of experience that is not directed by a willing (or, perhaps, wilful) mind. Where queer theories often emphasize desires, transgressions and tactics that reinforce a dualistic schematic of mind-body relations, theorising transness in its full diversity requires seeing the body as a reservoir of what we might term *agency* (or affect), rather than as matter awaiting moulding by the addition of meaning. The trans theory that thinkers like Chu and Drager call for is one in which the body really does matter. If the body didn't matter, after all, there would be no need to struggle with it in order to achieve trans embodiments. The matter would already be settled.

Such a trans theory would also question the transfixion in queer literature on resisting norms, instead of seeing norms as simultaneously both productive and inevitable:

> Whatever comes after trans studies – can I suggest transsexual theory? – will be
> impossible with antinormativity. The most powerful intervention scholars working in
> trans studies can make […] is to defend the claim that transness requires that we

understand, as we never have before, what it means to be attached to a norm – by desire, by habit, by survival.

(Chu and Harsin Drager, 2019, 108)

The demand that trans theory find its home in a place away from the queer interest in (or even obsession with) the anti-normative has a long legacy. This demand does not necessarily tally with more nuanced arguments about the normative that appear in queer theory's foundational texts. The frequent characterization of Butler's work as a celebration of resistance to norms leads to caricaturing of their work as anti-normative. This represents a misreading of Butler. As Colebrook explains, for Butler:

[T]he queer is not radically outside or beyond recognition and selfhood; it is that which makes a claim to be heard as human – within the norms of speech, gender, the polity and the symbolic – at the same time as it perverts the normative matrix.

(Colebrook, 2009, 15)

Butler's work is thus not anti-normative in the sense of seeking the dissolution of or escape from norms. Its task is more subtle: it is sensitive to norms as inhabited practices, rather than hegemonic ideologies that loom over those whose bodies and lives they control from above.[14] We have sought to address this misreading in Butler's work on norms by shifting to a Deleuzian ontology of embodiment and difference. As Colebrook (2009) explains, the shift is in the direction of establishing a more devolved model of agency in the production of difference with respect to the (differential) reproduction of norms through the becoming of a body/self beyond identity. This distributed agency, along with the potentiality and creativity of bodies in relation, results in forms of becoming that are radically open. A Deleuzian ontopolitics of the self, then, cannot be subsumed within the confines of any singular and static identity:

For Deleuze, the conditions of theory require a going 'beyond' of the self and the organism. As long as we are concerned with identity, with the repetition *of* who we are, we remain within constituted matter and lived time. To think transcendentally we need to think the pure form of time and difference, the pure intensities which each present repeats and actualises both in the present and for all time.

[… The resulting] queer politics would involve neither recognition of the self, nor a refusal of normativity, but the affirmation of the pre-personal.

(Colebrook, 2009, 20-21)

This pre-personal becoming, in which agency is distributed throughout and across 'selves', problematizes the logic of politics based on the affirmation of identities. Identities, trans and otherwise, are *always* problematic. In a Deleuzian framework, however, a problem is not only oppressive but also productive. Transness poses its problems by demanding new ways of theorising becoming, in which new selves emerge by composing a cacophony of bodies and intensities into more productive relations.

Transness emphasizes not just the territorialization of a yielding body by normativities, nor of the sovereign trans individual through embodied practices of gendered becoming (such as

transitioning). Transness also emphasizes *the agency of the body*. After all, the body would not be a site of struggle if it did not have a role in producing the struggles it hosts. The hair, the breasts, the voice – these are not just made meaningful in cisnormative gender discourse but become points of relation to others regardless of the intentions of the willing subject to whom they 'belong' (or whose bodies they are also constituents of).

Affirming this body and the assemblage rather than the subject is a priority of both a nascent trans theory and of a Deleuzian-Spinozan theory of life. The greatest difference in emphasis that a Deleuzian theory of embodiment brings is its ethical orientation towards affirmation of becoming. Our trans theory is not concerned with dismantling loci of dysphoria per se; its concern is with nurturing more concordant relations that produce thriving.

In this chapter we have argued for more attention to the affective micropolitics of everyday trans life instead of fixation on what Deleuze and Guattari (2004b) call the 'molar' politics of meaning and recognition that dominate trans political strategizing. Of course, this distinction is artificial. The micropolitical content of the banal is indissociable from the acrimony of the newspaper column or the sloganeering of the march. But the ability to live – to pursue concordant relations within and beyond a 'self' – is a necessary precondition for enacting other, more easily recognisable politics.

Living trans is a demand made on the world. It is also a queer repetition of the world, an iteration that creates difference. Whether the beard stays or goes is largely immaterial to our argument. What is at stake is not a gesture of defiance or of capitulation to regulating normative mechanisms, but rather a modulation of the field of possible relations open to a body as it persists and tries to thrive within a milieu. Pursuing concordance and reducing friction demands action aimed at enabling a more vital life, though such demands may also contain trade-offs. This vitality is not merely a reshaping of the self, but also of the assemblages that the self becomes *with* and *within*. What might at first look like a capitulation to a transphobic society or an attack on an uncompliant body is understood instead as part of a larger ecology of forces that, together, are reshaping our world by the repetition of sameness in order to produce difference. It is in this repetition and the pursuit of new, more conative modes of relation that we find a trans theory. Our trans theory plays the long game.

References

Berlin, S. (2015), 'Trans Space: Transition, Embodiment and the Politics of Passing', MSc diss., University of Bristol, Bristol.

Bockting, W., Robinson, B., Benner, A. and Scheltema, K. (2004), 'Patient satisfaction with transgender health services', Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 30 (4): 277–294.

Braidotti, R. (2006), 'Affirming the Affirmative: On Nomadic Affectivity', Rhizomes, 11/12.

Brice, S. (2020), 'Geographies of vulnerability: Mapping transindividual geometries of identity and resistance', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 45 (3): 664–677.

Brice, S. (in press), 'Trans subjectifications: Drawing an (im)personal politics of gender, fashion and style', *Geohumanities*.

Buchanan, I. (1997), 'The Problem of the Body in Deleuze and Guattari, Or, What Can a Body Do?' *Body & Society,* 3 (3): 73-91.

Burns, C. (2020), 'The big problem with the whole "trans women are women" thing is that it forces everyone to conduct a discourse on territory chosen by the people who don't like trans people', *Twitter*, 9 Jun. Available online: https://twitter.com/christineburns/status/1270284853943074818 (Accessed 1 January 2021).

Butler, J. ([1990] 2006), *Gender Trouble*, New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. ([1993] 2011), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2015), *Senses of the Subject*, New York: Fordham University Press.

Charnes, L. (1996), 'Styles that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Ideology Critique', *Shakespeare Studies*, 24: 118–147.

Chu, A. L. (2019), *Female*s, London and New York: Verso.

Chu, A. L. and Harsin Drager, E. (2019), 'After Trans Studies'. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly',* 6 (1): 103-116.

Colebrook, C. (2009), 'On the Very Possibility of Queer Theory', in C. Nigianni and M. Storr (eds), *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, 11-23, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Colebrook, C. (2014), 'Norm Wars', in *Sex After Life: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 2*, 23-48, Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press.

Colls, R. (2012), 'Feminism, bodily difference and non-representational geographies'. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 37(3): 430–445.

Crawford, L. C. (2008), 'Transgender without Organs? Mobilizing a Geo-Affective Theory of Gender Modification', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 36 (3/4): 127-143.

Davies, A., Bouman, W. P., Richards, C., Barrett, J., Ahmad, S., Baker, K., Lenihan, P., Lorimer, S., Murjan, S., Mepham, N., Robbins-Cherry, S., Seal, L. J. and Stradins, L. (2013), 'Patient satisfaction with gender identity clinic services in the United Kingdom', *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 28 (4): 400–418.

Deleuze, G. (1988), *Spinoza: Practical Philosoph*y, San Francisco: City Lights Books.

Deleuze, G. (2004a), *Difference and Repetition*, London and New York: Continuum.

Deleuze, G. (2004b) *The Logic of Sense*, London and New York: Continuum.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2004a), *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London and New York: Continuum.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2004b), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London and New York: Continuum.

Gill-Peterson, J. (2014), 'The Technical Capacities of the Body: Assembling Race, Technology, and Transgender', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1 (3): 402–418..

Hallward, P. (2000), 'The Limits of Individuation, or How to Distinguish Deleuze and Foucault', *Angelaki,* 5 (2): 93-111.

Hickey-Moody, A. and Rasmussen, M. L. (2009), 'The Sexed Subject In-Between Deleuze and Butler', in C. Nigianni and M. Storr (eds) *Deleuze and Queer Theory,* 37-53*,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Hughes, A. and Witz, A. (1997), 'Feminism and the Matter of Bodies: From de Beauvoir to Butler', *Body & Society*, 3 (1): 47–60.

Mahmood, S. (2011), *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Massumi, B. (2015), *The Politics of Affect*, Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Massumi, B. (2015), *The Power at the End of the Economy*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Mayer, T. K. Koehler, A., Eyssel, J. and Nieder, T. O. (2019), 'How Gender Identity and Treatment Progress Impact Decision-Making, Psychotherapy and Aftercare Desires of Trans Persons', *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 8 (5): 749.

Meijer, I. C. and Prins, B. (1998), 'How Bodies Come to Matter: An Interview with Judith Butler', *Signs:* 23 (2): 275-286.

Namaste, V. (2009), 'Undoing Theory: The "Transgender Question" and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminist Theory', *Hypatia,* 24 (3): 11-32.

Nelson, L. (1999), 'Bodies (and Spaces) Do Matter: The limits of performativity', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 6 (4): 331–353.

Pearce, R. (2018), *Understanding Trans Health: Discourse, Power and Possibility*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Pearce, R., Erikainen, S. and Vincent, B. (2020), 'TERF Wars: An Introduction', *The Sociological Review*, 68 (4): 677–698.

Primo, D., Zamperini, A. and Testoni, I. (2020), 'A struggle for definition: online narratives of Italian trans women', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 29 (5): 590–603.

Sauvagnargues, A. (2016), *Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon* (trans. S. Verderber & E. W. Holland), Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

Serano, J. (2007), *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.

Sharp, H. (2011), *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Spinoza, B. ([1675] 1996), *Ethics*, London: Penguin Books.

Stone, S. (1992), '"The Empire" Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto', *Camera Obscura*, 29: 150–176.

Wiegman, R. and Wilson, E. A. (2015), 'Introduction: Antinormativity's Queer Conventions', *differences* 26 (1): 1-25.

Williams, C. (2014), 'Gender Performance: The Transadvocate Interviews Judith Butler' *The Transadvocate*, 1 May. Available online: https://www.transadvocate.com/gender-performance-the-transadvocate-interviews-judith-butler_n_13652.htm (accessed 15 October 2020).

---

[1] 'We' in this chapter refers jointly to Sam Berlin and Sage Brice. We write this chapter to articulate an approach we have developed together as colleagues over at least four years of conversation. Sections of the chapter are written in the first person by Sage and are clearly marked as such; the remainder of the chapter is written in a unified voice.

Allowing for the limitations of such labels, Sam is a cis gay man with a research interest in gender and embodiment, and Sage is a queer and nonbinary trans woman with a research interest in trans and queer ecologies. We are both White and Jewish and from university-educated, middle-class families in the Global North. In writing about trans experience, we are conscious that our lives give us partial perspectives on issues that are highly contentious and have material impacts we may not appreciate. We are also mindful that our perspectives on these issues have been deeply informed and enabled by the work and words of many queer and trans people facing exclusions we do not face, not all of which is traceable or citeable. Without attempting to excuse ourselves for any oversights in this chapter, we therefore want to acknowledge that any argument we may put forward can and should only be evaluated amidst and alongside the thoughts of black and brown, working class, Global South and other marginalized scholars, organizers, artists and commentators.

[2] We use trans here to refer collectively to transgender, transsexual, nonbinary and other gender-variant identities.

[3] The ontology of gender we advocate here is also relevant for understanding sexual difference. We view the sex/gender distinction as less useful than it may first appear, not just because sex is also 'constructed', but also because segregating sex from gender mirrors an artificial division between body and mind or biology and culture that we argue against in this chapter.

[4] While we are aware that certain theorists – most notably Braidotti (2005) – posit Deleuze and Guattari's affirmative politics as antithetical to Butler's psychoanalytic concern with mourning and lack, we concur with Hickey-Moody and Rasmussen (2009), as well as Colebrook (2009; 2014), in finding a productive intersection between them for theorising the production and subversion of norms as aspects of the same generative process.

[5] This statement requires the caveat that some trans people prefer to speak of gender 'euphoria' as experiences of affirmation and congruity, rather than 'dysphoria', which foregrounds distress and alienation. Neither concept denotes a universal or definitive aspect of trans experience. Similarly, trans 'viable embodiments' need not be understood to follow a prescriptive form.

[6] On that short visit, the same volunteer also graced Sage with a long, detailed and graphic story of her experiences of genital reconstructive surgery.

[7] An important secondary element at work here is the fantasy that lesbian and gay people are transitioning to the 'other' sex in order to 'comply' with heterosexual norms, again despite the evidence that a majority of trans people post transition, in countries where sexual diversity is not heavily persecuted, are lesbian, gay, or bi/pansexual in orientation.

[8] A possible exception being Butler's discussions of Spinoza (see for example Butler, 2015)

[9] See Colebrook (2014) for an extended discussion of normativity and Deleuze. For Colebrook, rather than a subjective production of norms and recognition from an already consolidated anthropomorphic individual, a Deleuzian approach to the

problem of the performative and norms entails grounding in "something like a new subjectivism of life" (2014, 25) in which life is not synonymous with, or an effect of, performance, but rather is an immanent ground.

[10] This is an observation increasingly substantiated by neurological, genetic, and endocrinological research that highlights the inseparable interrelatedness of bodies and selves.

[11] We are grateful to our colleague Tom Keating for pointing out that Deleuze's philosophy is not necessarily overly concerned with liveability as an ethical priority. Our reading brings Deleuze and Guattari into conversation with Butler for precisely this reason: that their differing commitments taken together produce a politics that answers to trans lives in ways that neither does, alone.

[12] Agender people alone could perhaps be said to *not* engage with gender in some affirmative way. Further research with and/or by agender people might therefore yield new insights into this question.

[13] We make this distinction between embodiment and subjectivity to highlight the difference between gender difference as it exists and the processes through which it becomes meaningful.

[14] For a thorough discussion of the limitations of anti-normative feminist conceptualizations of agency and inhabited practice see also Mahmood (2011).