

Resistance without subjects: friction and the non-representational geography of everyday resistance

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“Misfitting can be understood as generative precisely given it involves friction; when bodies do not fit seamlessly into space, things happen”

Ahmed (2019, p. 224)

Introduction

Casting resistance as an oppositional transaction between the sovereign subject and hegemonic structures of power reduces the fluidity of difference to the rigidity of identity. While identity has been crucial for the formation of liberatory movements in the last two centuries, it is important also to consider its limitations (Crenshaw, 1991). To understand resistance as spatial – as geographical – requires a loosening of the concept from lingering attachments to the notion of a pre-given, intentional subject as its principal site. Thinking spatially requires attending to the ontological vulnerability of identity, and suggests a politics rooted in relations of becoming rather than being. Where ‘being’ emphasises stasis and identity, ‘becoming’ emphasises transformation and difference (Braidotti, 2019). A politics of becoming recognises that power is not an edifice but a process; a deeply inequitable process. This is the principle at work when Eric Stanley (2021, p. vii and throughout) writes of ‘structuring’ rather than ‘structured’ violence.¹ Treating power as a process changes my understanding of what resistance is and does.

In her recent review article, Sarah Hughes (2020, p. 1141) notes that in geographical thought, resistance has conventionally been construed quite narrowly as “organised opposition to a particular configuration of power relations”; a construction that emphasises structure and form over relational and processual dimensions. This preoccupation with the *form* of resistance has meant also that it is “often conceptualised as a dualism; resistance is considered emancipatory and acts against the seemingly totalising force of hegemonic state power” (2020, p. 1146). Hughes (2020, p. 1141) draws attention to the limitations of this framework in order to give context to her call for a more nuanced attention to the “seemingly unremarkable practices” of everyday resistance in which ‘intention’, ‘linearity,’ and ‘opposition’ are not necessarily the principal or definitive markers of political (in)action. Attention to the minutiae of the everyday is particularly crucial where erasure and denial (rather than subordination alone) is the threat that underpins a certain form of oppression. In these circumstances, creating a liveable sense of ‘selfhood’ and carving out spaces in which to do so can constitute vital and immediate forms of resistance that aren’t necessarily rooted in momentous oppositional events.

Theorising resistance as ‘more-than’ opposition brings useful insight to a persistent difficulty in feminist, queer, and trans approaches to theorising the political subject. In this context, a narrow understanding of resistance has at times produced a prescriptively normative approach that tries to delimit a ‘proper’ form for resistance to cis/hetero/patriarchal hegemonies (Berlin and Brice, forthcoming; Hines, 2019; Doan, 2010; Namaste, 2009).

¹ I have elsewhere used the term ‘structuration’ for the same reason (Brice, 2020).

For transgender, transsexual, nonbinary and gender-variant (trans) people, in particular, resistance is not straightforwardly a liberatory force in quite the same way that feminist and queer theory and politics have traditionally imagined it. I write this not to undermine a queer/feminist politics of refusal whose values and approach I strongly resonate with, but in order to demand a more nuanced and less prescriptive approach to imagining and conceptualising what an inclusive feminist and queer resistance might look like in practice. Interrogating the concept of resistance without starting from a point of view that assumes its normative form and liberatory value makes it possible to ask how resistance figures in the lives of trans people as an ambiguous and ambivalent force.²

In this chapter, therefore, I examine the concept of resistance as *both* a practice oriented towards opening up space to thrive in the face of oppressive systems, *and* a force of opposition or obstruction to that practice: an opposition experienced in the everyday as a kind of 'friction'. Moreover, I advance the case that these two senses of resistance are neither mutually exclusive nor fully extricable. The everyday frictions of resistance both obstruct and enable the thriving of individuals and communities marked as 'different'. Strategies for thriving in these conditions - for resistance to oppression in the most conventional sense - necessarily involve working with that friction to reduce its negative impacts and activate its generative potential. This is resistance, rather than resilience, because thriving amid adversity can be expressive of a transformative, even a liberatory, impetus.³ If this impetus goes unrecognised then an ethical and political commitment to liberation can too easily become a normative demand for opposition. In short, I argue that for trans people (and by extension also for other marginalised people), the path of least resistance isn't necessarily synonymous with the path of conformity. Indeed, finding the path of least resistance sometimes constitutes a form of resistance.

In the first part of this chapter, I will therefore develop an account of resistance *as* friction; friction that both enables and impedes liberatory or 'progressive' political change. Here resistance is conceived less as an act of diametric opposition to structural power, and more as a creative and critical engagement with that contradictory set of forces which friction activates. Where Hughes makes the important argument that resistance can be unintentional, emergent, and entangled, my purpose in this chapter is somewhat different. I wish to explore - not without caution - the tensions that arise from a recognition that resistance and opposition can cut both ways. Specifically, I propose that in order to understand how resistance factors in the lives of trans people, it is necessary to consider resistance as a multiplicity; something that both enables and inhibits, and which cannot be straightforwardly accounted for through the model of resistance as opposition to structural power.

Crucially, resistance that impedes or constrains trans lives, and resistance that enables them, cannot be neatly disentangled into two opposing forces: 'for' and 'against'. Rather, when understood as friction, the forces of resistance can be seen to be relational, so that it is sometimes by avoiding, adapting to, or pre-empting resistance - reducing friction - that trans people resist coercion and constraint. Equally, trans people can find that they bump up against - experience friction from - conflicting and contradictory challenges. This is perhaps most self-evident in Julia Serano's (2007) example of the transmisogyny double-bind, whereby transfeminine people are accused of either being insufficiently feminine or conforming to prescriptive ideas of femininity (or sometimes both), leaving

² Rather than imagine 'liberation' as an absolute freedom from power relations entailing a dualistic opposition between power and freedom, liberation here is understood as a dynamic and relational process; a movement towards relative freedom from violence, coercion, and constraint.

³ On the relationship of resilience to a *status quo* see Evans and Reid (2014).

no acceptable path of transfeminine presentation and self-expression. The double-bind here is indicative of the ways in which friction can sometimes operate as a trap, but I want to foreground also the more mundane ways in which friction shapes habits and practices of *doing* gender in the everyday.

In the second part of this chapter I discuss the possibility that thinking of resistance as something more than straightforward opposition entails different activist possibilities which may be useful in challenging particular forms of oppressive politics - particularly those that are embedded and entangled within avowedly liberatory movements. Here activism is understood as a mode of resistance involving organised or targeted action for social change. Specifically, I will reflect on my experiences working with a small collective to run workshops addressing underlying causes of transphobia within feminist and environmental activist communities in the UK. These workshops were not conceived or carried out as fieldwork, but took place in parallel with my academic studies in non-representational geographies and process ontologies more widely; studies which deeply informed my experimental approach to the transphobia work. Since the workshops were not conceived as research at the time, discussion in this chapter is limited to critical reflection on my own practice and discussion with my workshop partners, rather than an empirical examination of the workshop content and process.⁴

The discomfort of friction

Perhaps it is best to begin by saying that I write this entire chapter from a place of ambivalent unease. The work it discusses was uncomfortable work that walked a fine and troubled line between the politics of conciliation and refusal. The theoretical argument it advances - that resistance is not adequately accounted for as dualistic opposition - issues a gentle challenge to the politics of refusal, and in doing so, comes close to making an argument for recognition and inclusion as political goals. My aim, however, is not to propose a 'middle way' between these apparent poles, but rather to argue something which I think resonates most strongly with abolitionist and revolutionary critiques of the totalising forces of capitalism and the state. That 'something' is the contention that so-called identity is not a property of the individual but a problem of the collective. More specifically, my argument is that resistance should be theorised not as a transaction between the individual and fixed, hegemonic structures of power, but as a mode of relation through which individuals (taken together) navigate, challenge, transform, and survive the violent structuration of their (our) lives within organising fields of persistent and uneven power relations.

"The concept of everyday resistance", Rae Rosenberg (2021, p. 1398) notes, "encapsulates the mundane and often invisibilised acts of living that [contribute] to the construction of activist subjectivities." Writing on Black queer and trans young people in an urban gay village, Rosenberg highlights a critical dimension in the resistance of marginalised and excluded communities; the art of surviving and thriving in small ways. For those who experience intersecting marginalisations, this may involve navigating contradictory, non-linear terrains wherein varied assortments of solidarities and oppressions sit awkwardly side-by-side in each available space, rather than a dualistic opposition

⁴ Ethical approval for this work is currently being sought retrospectively from the Ethics Committee of Durham University. Because the workshops were not intended as research activities at the time, there was no systematic collection of data; nor was consent sought from workshop participants to collect data for research purposes. This chapter therefore uses only auto-ethnographic material, and no identifying information or research data is included from individual participants. All members of the collective have given consent for this discussion of our work and methods.

between hegemony and liberation (Boussalem, 2021). The pervasiveness of racism in queer circles is one example of how self-consciously liberatory spaces can also be exclusionary and oppressive (Puar, 2007).

For Priyanka Jindal (2008, p. 46), the critical distinction between queers of colour and the largely white 'mainstream' of queer culture is that for people of colour "resistance is not necessarily about choice, it's about survival." Jindal is writing of racism in queer spaces, an enduring concern which I do not wish to subsume into a generalised equivalence with other forms of oppression. Gender- and race- based oppressions should not be conflated. At the same time, it makes little sense to speak of them as entirely independent, given the intimacy with which racialisation and the enforcement of binary gender are bound up in colonial systems of knowledge production (Schuller, 2017; Snorton, 2017). The key insight which I draw on here - that resistance and agency are about more than choice and self-expression - holds true also for most multiply-marginalised groups. One part of this argument is the assertion that resistance carries more material urgency for racialised queers and that often this entails a deeper political commitment to revolutionary change (see also Davis, 1992), but there is also an ontological claim here about the nature of resistance and agency, and therefore about the nature of political subjectivity (see also Mahmood, 2011). Without playing down the importance of a radical commitment to opposition in liberatory politics, my aim here is to attend to the ways in which resistance is not always and only dualistic and oppositional.

To do this, I develop the idea of resistance as friction. Anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2004) uses 'friction' to complicate the idea of the culture clash. She demonstrates that, far from presenting a smooth and orderly frontal opposition, resistance to globalised environmental extraction emerges in a zone of awkward engagement characterised by misunderstandings and messy alliances across difference which are nevertheless sometimes generative and productive of desired outcomes. For Tsing, the metaphor of friction appeals as a counter to the neoliberal ideal of a new and unimpeded global 'flow' under global capitalism. Tsing (2004, p. 5) insists that "motion does not proceed this way at all"; in fact, motion across the globe's surface necessarily requires friction in order to have traction. Like railway tracks, that friction imposes directions and constraints as well as enabling movement. What is more, the friction of encounter across difference is potentially transformative:

"a study of global connections shows the grip of encounter: friction. A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road; spinning in the air it goes nowhere. Rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light; one stick alone is just a stick. As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power"

Tsing, 2004, p.5

It is worth noting that for Tsing (2004, p. 6), "friction is not a synonym for resistance"; this is because "hegemony is made as well as unmade with friction." Thus on the face of it, Tsing might seem to reject my proposed model of resistance as friction. Yet Tsing's use of the word 'resistance' here refers specifically to the concept of resistance as diametric opposition to structures of power - a definition which I aim to unsettle. With this caveat taken into account, there are two ways in which her conceptualisation of friction is useful to my project. First, Tsing contends that it is through friction that generalised political structures become effective: "friction gives purchase to universals, allowing them to spread as frameworks for the practice of power" (2004, pp. 8; 10). In other words, friction is what occurs when individual lives bump up against structural oppositions to difference. Importantly,

however, “engaged universals are never fully successful in being everywhere the same *because of this same friction*” (2004, p. 10, emphasis added). Friction is thus also what produces the specificities and singularities of particular encounters; the “awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference.” (2004, p. 4).

The second insight is that “these kinds of ‘friction’ inflect motion, offering it different meanings” (Tsing, 2004, p. 6). In other words, friction is a force which affects how particular bodies and lives move through space and time and are given meaning. This is both a constraining and an emancipatory force; friction contains the possibilities of rupture, transformation, and dissent as well as the limits by which structural inequalities can impose upon lives and communities marked as ‘different’.

Like Tsing, Cresswell (2014) develops the concept of friction as a framework for thinking about differential mobility - how some bodies move, or are impeded in moving, through space. This concept has been further elaborated by crip/disability scholars (Hall and Bates, 2019; Hamraie, 2017). Hall and Bates employ Cresswell’s framework to explore geographies of anxiety and precarity in the lives of adults with learning disabilities, observing that “people feel social and embodied ‘friction’ as they move, and choose routes to reduce or avoid such constraints” (Hall and Bates, 2019, p. 105). While Cresswell’s account draws on the example of war and military planning, and Hall and Bates emphasise the dimension of choice, both accounts also draw attention to the material, contingent, and relational nature of frictions which often escape or exceed the domain of cognitive intentionality. In other words, friction not only names conscious responses to structural inequalities, but also the affects and atmospheres with which non-representational geographies are concerned.

Generative Friction

I, too, first began to think with the concept of friction when trying to articulate an aspect of my (trans) experience which I felt was not fully accounted for by logics of choice, representation, and self-expression. I have written briefly elsewhere on this idea, exploring what it might mean to understand trans experiences of transphobia and dysphoria, including my own, as a kind of friction. I drew this conceptual analogy from the experience of shaving my face as a transfeminine person - and together with my colleague Sam Berlin, developed the argument that difference should be understood not as the fixed property of a body but as emerging “within and through a body’s relations” (Berlin and Brice, forthcoming, p. 1).

Friction, in that chapter, named a number of things: the physical abrasiveness of the blade against agitated skin and stubble; the dysphoria induced by daily close engagement with a ‘sexed’ bodily feature (facial hair); and the cumulative impacts of regular misgendering on the business of everyday life. These are various kinds of friction that inflect everyday experience of living whilst trans. My habits of shaving or not shaving - not wholly determined by self-expression and/or intent - are also directed by these differential frictions. Thus, for example, prior to transition I kept my beard trimmed rather than shaving it, as this was the lowest-maintenance and hence least dysphoric option open to me: the option which generated least ‘friction’. After transition, I began instead to remove my facial hair, because the relative balance between different frictional forces shifted. My habits reoriented to what was now the ‘less abrasive’ option. In either case, questions of representation and self-expression were secondary to more material considerations of how it *feels* to move through spaces and relate to both my own embodied experience and my encounters with/in a wider social world (Salamon, 2010).

The two key points which friction helped us to articulate in that chapter were - first - a sense that practices of gender are informed not only by 'choice' and 'self-expression' but by a more distributed field of forces, material affects and relational possibilities, and - second - that this recognition requires a politics that is not too firmly attached to the idea of individual sovereignty as a mode of opposition to societal norms. Following Butler (2011), we argued that norms are not merely prescriptive but are also necessary enabling constraints in the articulation of liveable and liberatory practices of gender. We drew on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2004) to bring together these two points, arguing for a 'trans-individual' politics that foregrounds vitality rather than opposition.

What this telling left somewhat under-developed, however, was a sense of friction as a generative and potentially desirable mode of engagement and connection. In describing my changing habits as a seemingly 'natural' tendency towards the path of 'least friction', I missed an opportunity to fully realise the ways that friction in fact underscores our wider argument; the argument that identity and/or difference is not an individual characteristic but a relational field. Friction is relation and encounter, and as such, friction is not only a source of discomfort but also a space of transformative possibility.

The kind of ambivalent frictions I am pointing to here find a clear and evocative articulation in Harlan Weaver's (2014) analysis of Leslie Feinberg's landmark novel *Stone Butch Blues*. The novel's protagonist, Jess Goldberg, navigates a troubled path through the zone of indeterminate masculinity, experimenting with masculinising hormones and with 'passing' as a man before settling for a less socially acceptable, but more connected and ultimately more tolerable state of 'in-betweenness'. Weaver (2014, p. 88) contrasts the abrasive emotional landscape of Jess's misfit life with the "lack of friction" experienced by the heteronormative subject whose shape "meets but does not rub up against" the world through which they move.

Weaver here is building on Sara Ahmed's (2014, p. 148) contention that "heteronormativity functions as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape." Indeed, Ahmed (2019, p. 41) has since also used the concept of friction to (re)articulate this observation:

"Friction is the resistance the surface of an object encounters when moving over another. The more people travel on a path, the flatter and smoother the surface becomes. When something is smoother, it is clearer; the more a path is followed, the easier it is to follow. Once something has become used, you are encouraged to go in that direction: your progression would be eased"

Friction in this account names the discomfort of not fitting in with familiar pathways and the pressures which come to bear on bodies and lives which fail to follow them. However, this does not translate into a simple formula in which friction is a purely inhibitory constraint. For Feinberg's Jess, the absence of friction did not equate to comfort, so much as a state of loneliness, disconnection, and invisibility. Friction offered instead a way of being connected, in relation to and with a social world that is necessary to thriving.

Considering resistance as multi-directional also raises the question of who is envisioned *doing* the resistance. For example, what is the difference between saying that trans *bodies* resist categorisation, and that trans *persons* resist prescriptive gender assignments? How does each of these formulations position trans subjectivities and identities? When a person experiences dissonance and incongruence in relation to their own body, that body might be simultaneously resistant to social expectations attached to sex and gender, and also to an individual's desire for congruence. Resistance as opposition reinforces a cartesian concept of the thinking, experiencing self as somehow separate and distinct from their body - whereas friction emphasises instead the condition of becoming-in-relation.

In conclusion, the work that friction does here is threefold: first, it draws attention to the ways that structural attitudes and inequalities impinge upon individual lives through forces of abrasion and drag - forces not always necessarily best accounted for through major incidents or momentous events. Second, its analogy to the materiality of bodies in relative stasis and motion emphasises that friction operates as a force - influencing the flow and arrangement of "seemingly mundane, habitual and non-reflexive practices" (Hall and Wilton in Hall and Bates, 2019, p. 1010) in ways that may not be fully conscious and considered, or indeed may never register as a discernible effects, but nevertheless profoundly influence the paths that lives follow. Third, and most importantly for my argument here, it replaces the model of resistance as opposition with the idea of resistance as a relational mode of encounter which produces diverse strategies for surviving and thriving.

Activating friction

In this second half of the chapter, I explore the implications of 'resistance as friction' for developing a process-based activist approach to combatting transphobia in feminist spaces, particularly within environmental and anti-capitalist communities.

As noted above, this section draws on my work with the Dandelion Collective, a small group of feminists of various genders with a background in facilitation and a desire to address the schisms opened up by unaddressed transphobia in our activist communities.⁵ Before discussing the work of the group in more detail, I want to contextualise the problem. At a theoretical level, we were informed by the idea that gender is best understood not as the property of an individual but a collective problem which we all navigate in relation. The struggle for trans liberation therefore involves not only a contestation over individual rights, but a deeper intervention into the texture of this collective problem, facilitating a shift in the field of gendered possibilities. This idea aligns philosophically with my interest in process ontologies, and more specifically with non-representational theories in geography, in that it seeks to attend to difference as a process of becoming rather than a relationship between fixed states of being (Brice, 2020; Anderson and Harrison, 2010; Thrift, 2008). Thinking in terms of process and not identity suggests "...an alternate politics, one grounded not in the indeterminacy of transgender bodies, but rather in the indeterminacy of the social" (Weaver, 2014, p. 86).

This approach was informed also by the recognition that oppositional resistance can be mobilised in either direction; as a liberatory or a counter-liberatory opposition. This is seen for example in the

⁵ I refer to the Dandelion Collective by name, with the consent of all members. While members have read and commented on this chapter, the argument it advances follows my own academic interests, and I alone am answerable for its flaws and limitations.

increasingly effective adoption, by reactionary forces on the right, of concepts and discourses which originated with liberatory movements (Ahmed, 2016; Butler et al., 2016). As Catherine Nash and Kath Browne (2020) have observed, resistance to LGBT equality can also take on an activist orientation, and indeed exists as a significant organised resistance to a perceived hegemonic LGBT order threatening an imperilled heterocentric way of life or set of values. While this inverted model of power and resistance *can* be a purely strategic or rhetorical move by those dedicated to opposing equality, it can also manifest as a sincerely felt anxiety among people who see themselves as committed to ideals of social justice and equality. In particular, anti-trans campaigns frequently construe themselves - not always disingenuously - as defending imperilled minorities against a range of perceived threats including 'lesbian erasure', "'transing" of young girls' (or children more widely), invasion of 'single-sex spaces', erosion of 'sex-based rights', and so on (Pearce, 2020; Faye, 2021).

My aim here is not only to affirm that resistance, as others have rightly pointed out (eg Sharp et al, 2000), is usually - if not always - entangled with power in complex and messy ways (and is indeed a force or movement of power in its own right), and that resistance is therefore not solely or necessarily oppositional. More specifically, I argue here that the model of resistance which assumes opposition as its definitive characteristic also produces an overly simplistic set of normative assumptions about *how* marginalised lives are shaped by oppression, as well as *what* resistance can and should look like. To argue this line is tricky because it comes uncomfortably close to arguing for a politics of moderation or a 'middle path'. Relinquishing the moral certainty of opposition can feel like compromise; like capitulation or conciliation. This is decidedly not my intention. My proposition here is therefore conditional upon maintaining an explicit and sustained commitment to the principle that there is no place for compromise or 'debate' between two propositions where there exists a stark asymmetry of power and harm. That is, where one side exclusively seeks to deny the dignity, integrity, and basic human needs of the other. Friction, here, names something distinct from compromise - it is the possibility for generative and transformative encounter that emerges when difference comes into contact. Friction incorporates, but crucially is not limited to, the force of opposition (in technical terms: 'normal force', which is the net force compressing two surfaces together). In addition to normal force, friction activates both drag and traction; forces which both inhibit and enable movement.

The Dandelion Collective emerged in response to growing frictions in feminist and anti-capitalist spaces of which members were part; tensions which came to a head during the UK government's extended public consultation on reform of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 (GRA). The proposed procedural reform was intended to make legal registration easier and less discriminatory for trans people seeking a gender certificate for purposes such as marriage and taxation (Pearce et al., 2020). The protracted consultation provided fertile ground for a well-resourced campaign against trans inclusion⁶ in 'single-sex spaces', whose primary legislative target was not the GRA itself, but the wider rights and protections afforded to trans people under the Equalities Act 2010. The UK saw a huge rise in largely negative media coverage of trans people during this period, and a corresponding rise in public attention to trans issues⁷ (Armitage, 2020; Independent Press Standards Organisation, 2020).

⁶ While I write here on resistance to inclusion, I do not hold inclusion itself as a political end goal. For incisive commentary on how 'inclusion' extends violence and coercion see Ahmed (2012) and Stanley (2021).

⁷ After numerous delays and extensions, the conservative government under Johnson eventually decided to disregard the outcomes of this consultation, and GRA reform was limited to a reduction in registration fees and a statement of intention to take the application process online.

Over a period of two years, the collective delivered a small number of workshops at community centres and festivals in England and Wales, in which we explored fears and concerns arising from this increased attention to questions of trans recognition and inclusion. The majority of participants in these workshops identified (in good faith) as feminists,⁸ and all evidenced demonstrably high levels of commitment to ethical and political practices in their daily lives. All, however, situated themselves somewhere on a spectrum from confusion to outright opposition, regarding at least some aspects of trans recognition and inclusion.

We devised our workshop methods from the shared perception that pervasive doubts and concerns about trans recognition and inclusion stem at least in part from attachment to specific 'survival stories' about the nature of sex and gender; stories developed by feminists as a defensive reaction to the impacts of misogyny and patriarchy. Increasingly over the course of our work, we came to think of these attachments as embodied and traumatic as well as ideological. As such, we felt that simply attempting to shut down those doubts and fears, or to reason against them - though justified in principle - was likely to compound rather than address the problem. We believed this was specifically and perhaps exceptionally the case with regard to combatting transphobia because of the specific ways sex and gender identity figure in feminist liberatory epistemologies. We were not entirely convinced by the liberal-progressive narrative that sees resistance to trans inclusion as simply bigotry; that is, as the next in a series of frontiers following inexorably on from civil rights and LGB struggles (which, of course, also have yet to be won). In essence, this meant we saw more reason than usual to be optimistic about the possibility of transforming rather than shutting down oppositional feelings.

We saw our approach as one option among a number of valid activist/pedagogical approaches to tackling transphobia. For example, during the same period I attended a workshop detailing the significant parallels between anti-trans and fascist tactics and ideologies. The analysis was rigorous and informative, and concluded by advancing a case for applying established anti-fascist principles (such as no-platforming and exclusion from communal and organising spaces) in order to uproot transphobia from within the anarchist/anti-capitalist movement. This approach could be seen as antithetical to the one our collective adopted, which necessarily entailed holding space open for participants to explore potentially transphobic feelings and ideas. The danger of seeming to legitimise or facilitate those feelings and ideas by adopting a somewhat conciliatory approach is one that I was painfully aware of throughout our workshops. The feeling stayed with me despite having the explicit blessing of trans friends who had themselves adopted more uncompromising positions and commitments to oppositional action. I understood this discomfort as inherent to the kind of encounter- and process- based work we were trying to do. As such, it was not only a sacrifice or a necessary 'price to pay' for reaching a wider potential pool of people, but an integral part of the friction of encounter across difference which we considered necessary to transformative change.

Indeed, though we didn't frame it this way at the time, friction was in some senses the guiding force that informed the experimental development of our workshop methods. Friction worked in these workshops in four key ways. First, by welcoming awkwardness into the space. At the start of each workshop I explicitly acknowledged the discomfort, as a trans person, of seeming to tacitly condone positions which I perceive to be causing material harm to myself and to my trans siblings. Naming the discomfort became a part of the transformative impetus of the workshops, because my shared

⁸ One exception preferred to understand all struggle in terms of class, while a second felt more comfortable naming himself as an ally.

vulnerability effectively demanded a reciprocal level of integrity and openness from participants. The welcome ritual we used⁹ was extensive, designed to open up a space where participants felt able to show up in their entirety, including with doubts, uncertainties, and conflict.¹⁰

Second, by alleviating friction in a number of important ways. A significant portion of the workshops was dedicated to 'container building' - addressing some of the potential barriers and creating a sense of safety, trust, and clear boundaries. Participant feedback indicated that this profoundly influenced the dynamic of the workshop. Using techniques such as body awareness and grounding exercises, humour, and careful sharing of vulnerabilities, we worked to elicit a shift of atmosphere and disposition among participants, thus enabling a more open flow of ideas and feelings and an easing of oppositional positionality.

Third, through heightening friction where this felt necessary. By insisting on examining the composition of trans-facing fears or concerns in very high resolution, we forced a slowing down and invited a closer, more intimate engagement with participants' fears. One way we did this was through an adaptation of the classic 'fishbowl' exercise. In this exercise, members of a minority group form an 'inner circle' to engage in active discussion of a matter that affects them, while their peers or colleagues form an 'outer circle' who only listen and observe. This technique enables groups to examine issues that disproportionately affect their minority members, without majority perspectives dominating or derailing the discussion. Our use of the technique was slightly recalibrated; the team of three gender-diverse facilitators used the space to engage in depth with example fears and concerns sourced from previous participants. In a sense, the fishbowl was turned inside out so that it was the majority group whose experiences were placed under scrutiny, though the power dynamic of whose voices were centered remained consistent with the original design.

The process was carried out in two rounds, with workshop participants having an opportunity to process together in pairs between each round but maintaining the separation between fishbowl and listeners. In the first round, we as the facilitators spent time working with a single fear or concern, trying to imagine and understand what might be at stake for the concerned individual, and to piece together a detailed picture of the imagined scenarios that might inform that fear. For example, when exploring the fear that young women might be pressured to transition in order to escape misogyny, we took time to explore who was envisioned as experiencing that pressure, what forms societal pressure might take and from where, and how transition might be imagined in this situation as a means of escape. We floated the idea that the concerned individual might themselves identify in some ways with the young women in this imagined scenario, and speculated about the kinds of feelings this could give rise to. In the second round, we tried to imagine what might be missing from that picture - not only information, but also alternate imagined scenarios. In this instance, we discussed barriers young people experience to transition, and noted the kinds of advice we have seen given to young people in trans spaces (never to rush; not to seek immediate answers). We also looked at the ways in which gatekeeping can inadvertently have the opposite of a deterrent effect, if it denies young people

⁹ Modelled on a technique taught by the Training for Change collective

¹⁰ There is of course a cost to the performative use of vulnerability by marginalised people to elicit learning and political transformation in members of the marginalising group - for example trans people doing anti-transphobia work, black people or people of colour doing anti-racism work, disabled people doing anti-ableism work, and so on. A downside of our model as a collective was that we found it draining and exhausting (as well as exhilarating and rewarding) to organise and run the workshops. This, alongside the weight of multiple other commitments and our struggle to source adequate funding, was undoubtedly one of the reasons that the work of the collective has not so far become properly sustainable.

the chance to safely explore uncertainty. The sheer weight of detailed attention and care which we as facilitators brought to each round of the activity produced its own forms of drag and traction. Creating a separation between the performing/listening space and the processing space meant there was little opportunity to be reactive.¹¹ Instead, participants reported deep surprise at discovering how much there was to consider in relation to issues that they might previously have held reactive positions on.

Fourth, by valuing encounter and difference, we were able to elicit the generative buzz that comes from bringing unfamiliar or incompatible perspectives together in one space. Refusing to adopt an oppositional stance - while remaining clear about our own boundaries and principles - opened up a space to engage differently. Attending to friction becomes transformative, because friction is where the force of resistance is situated and expressed. This is unusual in a culture that tends either to stifle opinion in order to avoid conflict, or to approach conflict as an oppositional dualism (right/wrong, good/bad, etc.).¹² Such a limiting framework can shut down the possibility for transformative change, since friction is a necessary condition of movement.

Conclusions

In conclusion, friction offers a way of conceptualising resistance that does not assume a dualistic oppositional form as its prerequisite for politics. Through analogy to the physics of normal force, drag, and traction, the concept of friction encompasses both the inhibitive and the mobilising effects of resistance. The analogy enables a consideration of the ways in which resistance enables, or prevents, the relative freedoms of bodies moving through space; in other words, a consideration of resistance as a geographical force. This, in turn, informs a more nuanced reading of the ways in which resistance plays out in the lives of those for whom resistance is situated in the everyday business of surviving and thriving in the face of opposition, and for whom refusal is but one important strategy among many. Finally, this reading also suggests a particular kind of activist sensibility; one which utilises friction rather than opposition to create spaces of transformative possibility. As my brief case study of the Dandelion Collective elucidates, finding ways to work beyond Friction here is not an alternative to opposition, but rather includes and also exceeds it. As a mode of resistance, friction is admittedly not a panacea, and notably comes at a cost that may sometimes be disproportionately met by the oppressed and marginalised. Nevertheless, I argue that conceptualising resistance as friction supports a more nuanced and complete picture of what resistance might look like in practice.

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¹¹ The highly structured and controlled environment we created, and which was necessary in this setting to prevent sliding off into opposition, also had its limitations. Given more time for trust to develop, this need for control might be gradually relinquished - thus deepening the transformation.

¹² Working 'against the grain' of opposition took a lot of energy, however, as we continuously worked to accommodate the emotional processes of everyone in the space as well as our own. One member of the collective later reflected that this had been a classic example of a 'hardworking femme' project.

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