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SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE FUTURES OF TRANS PHILOSOPHY

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

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Note: This special issue on the futures of trans philosophy is guest edited by Imogen Sullivan and Rowan Bell. It includes five peer-reviewed papers and an introduction from Sullivan and Bell. We extend our deep thanks and appreciation to the authors, referees, and especially to Sullivan and Bell for all their work in creating this timely and important issue.

– Barrett Emerick and Ami Harbin
Co-editors, *APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy*

In this special issue, "Futures of Trans Philosophy," we present five new works of trans philosophy that, when read together, address the compound question: What is trans philosophy, and where can trans philosophy go from here? Trans philosophy is young by any measure, but especially within the long history of philosophy. By most accounts, we are either just approaching or just passing the inaugural decade of professional trans philosophy as an academic discipline. The arc of the articles presented here is meant to be understood within this historical context. The first clears the discursive ground, while the last speculates on two specific future directions. Those in between engage a variety of pressing philosophical issues in trans circles: how to live in one's body, how to live outside the binary, and how to decolonize transness.

A guiding motivation for us as editors has been the production of a fully t4t issue of a peer-reviewed philosophy journal. By *t4t philosophy*, we mean *trans-for-trans philosophy*: projects by and for trans people, written with an ethos of care, trust, solidarity, and love. This is contrasted with those projects that are written about us, often from a place of fear, loathing, infantilization, or dehumanizing curiosity, and for the sake of a non-trans audience. We take t4t philosophy to require a variety of tones and modes of engagement. For example, since trans theory and trans experience do not restrict themselves to the boundaries of formal academic journals, some of the pieces included here will engage with sources outside of those boundaries. Moreover, trans-antagonism is virulent and vicious; it does not play by the rules of charitable and professional philosophical engagement. In particular, the intellectual trans-antagonism existing in professional philosophy and academia more broadly is not limited to peer-reviewed publications, though it unfortunately makes its way through peer review quite often. As such, we believe a t4t special issue in philosophy should not have to create the intellectual and cultural space for trans existence and flourishing with one hand tied behind its back. Just as trans people's experience of trans-antagonism in philosophy occurs in a variety of forms, the work included in this special issue will engage and critique trans-antagonism in a variety of forms, including peer-reviewed publications as well as public comments by philosophers in other spaces.

Similarly, some professionally published anti-trans ideology seems to have such a pernicious staying power and seems to begin from *prima facie* desirable premises (though they become overstretched and misapplied to an extreme). Some authors in this special issue will engage and therefore "platform" so-called gender critical positions. The purpose here is not to suggest that these are positions worth treating as intellectual achievements, because generally they are not. Rather, in keeping with our t4t framework, these engagements serve as a sort of inoculation against such poison for trans readers. Our decision is motivated by the payoff of replacing the seemingly plausible starting premises with a robust and compelling alternative that serves trans existence and flourishing without sacrificing any of the earlier power of its predecessor. There is value in showing trans-antagonistic arguments to be flawed by their own lights.

Some work included here is polemical in nature, whether flagged as such or not. In all cases, we have decided that varieties of tone do not undermine or detract from the underlying argumentation and philosophical point. More importantly, as editors of a t4t publication, we have embraced work that might appear to others as confrontational, cynical, or sarcastic. As trans philosophers and trans people, we find that this approach sometimes makes trans life livable in the interregnum as authoritative figures in our field (and most major societies across the globe) actively and dispassionately entertain open debates about the liveability and desirability of our lives without meaningfully or responsibly engaging our stories, our philosophies, or us.

In "The Circulation of Trans Philosophy: A Philosophical Polemic," Amy Marvin chronicles the variety of ways in which trans philosophy gets "circulated" within the profession and the world. "Circulation" here denotes not just the circulation of ideas, but also of emotions. The paper tracks the affective, social, and political dimensions of "trans" and

"trans philosophy" as they move among trans and non-trans philosophers alike—often in ways that benefit the latter at the expense of the former. Marvin argues that the trajectory tends towards the elimination of trans philosophy from the discipline at large, and as such, that an attention to these circulations is crucial for considering trans philosophy's future.

In "Sovereign: A Defense of the Modified Body," Ray Briggs challenges feminist arguments against body modification, instead arguing that trans experiences of body modification enable a livable life. While Briggs holds that there is wisdom in the feminist critique of any body modification that serves oppressive norms, it is a mistake to conflate body modification with capitulation to oppressive norms. Briggs contends that, for trans people, body modification may make one's body *one's own*. Briggs thus articulates what they call the *Principle of the Hospitable Body*, according to which one deserves to live in a body that feels like home, even if the home is a reno.

In "Becoming Unrecognizable: A Deleuzian Reading of Non-binary Gender Expressions," Capucine Mercier seeks to clarify the meaning of the term "non-binary" for gendered existence. Mercier distinguishes two approaches to understanding identity and desire. The first draws from Judith Butler's early work on gender performativity and its focus on recognition; the second builds from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of becoming and the molecular/molar distinction. Mercier argues that non-binary gender expression is best understood as a rejection of the desire for gendered recognition.

In "Decolonial Trans Futurity: A Trans of Color Critique of Normative Assimilation," Sanjula Rajat and Billie Waller draw from María Lugones's work on the colonial/modern gender system and Jasbir Puar's articulation of trans(homo)nationalism to develop a trans of color analytical framework. Utilizing this framework to analyze contemporary transnormativity, Rajat and Waller then connect the medicalization of transness with the whiteness of coloniality and offer in place of these normative regimes an articulation of decolonial trans futurity.

And finally, in "Trans Philosophy: A Tale of Two Futures," Perry Zurn considers where trans philosophy might go from here. He draws attention to what trans philosophy might lose as it gains prominence within philosophy, and critiques what he describes as a move away from trans interconnectivity in the real world, towards the solitary trans thinker or the academic trans text. Zurn argues that trans philosophy must be grounded in trans sociality; only then, he argues, can it do justice to the work we need it to do.

ABOUT *APA STUDIES ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY*

APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy is sponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of Women and Gender. The newsletter is designed to provide an introduction to recent philosophical work that addresses issues of gender. None of the varied philosophical views presented by authors of *APA Studies* articles necessarily reflect the views of any or all of the members of the Committee on the Status of Women and Gender, including the editor(s) of the newsletter, nor does the committee advocate any particular type of feminist philosophy. We advocate only that serious philosophical attention be given to issues of gender and that claims of gender bias in philosophy receive full and fair consideration.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

1. Purpose: The purpose of *APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy* is to publish information about the status of women in philosophy and to make the resources of feminist philosophy more widely available. *APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy* contains discussions of recent developments in feminist philosophy and related work in other disciplines, suggestions for eliminating gender bias in the traditional philosophy curriculum, and reflections on feminist pedagogy. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on the Status of Women and Gender. Articles submitted to the newsletter should be around ten double-spaced pages and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language. Please submit essays electronically to the editor. All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. References should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

2. Where to Send Things: Please send all articles, comments, suggestions, books, and other communications to the editors: Ami Harbin, Oakland University, at aharbin@oakland.edu, and Barrett Emerick, St. Mary's College, at bmemerick@smcm.edu.

3. Submission Deadlines: Submissions for spring issues are due by the preceding November 1; submissions for fall issues are due by the preceding February 1.

ARTICLES

The Circulation of Trans Philosophy: A Philosophical Polemic

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LAFAYETTE COLLEGE

> "I can keep digging. I could pull us down to the center of the earth." – *Celeste*

1. FOREWARNED TO A CENSORED ESSAY

I began writing this in 2019 while editing my essay "A Brief History of Trans Philosophy," during which I removed all comments that could be dismissed as overly negative

and placed them into a separate document. I tend to limit myself by strategically navigating the association between trans women and meanness, negativity, narcissism, delusion, vanity, dishonesty, brittleness, jealousy, anger, contagion, divisiveness, pettiness, resentment, wantonness, oversensitivity, melancholy, deceptiveness, unprofessionalism, and destructive irrational bad feelings, so my document became the garbage bin behind my outward professional self-presentation. I repeatedly returned to this document, filling it with my discarded, edited out, and self-censored comments, while my disposed-of negativity took on a life of its own. Most of this refuse was given shape when I thought I had been permanently discarded from academic philosophy and trans cultural-professional scenes before becoming academically undead in 2021. Though I am lucky to now be employed with a living wage, excellent colleagues, and a vibrant local arts scene, I still remain contingent. Part of this contingency is a choice, since I am pursuing a tenure-track job that balances access to friendship and community, access to basic ongoing trans medical care, the likelihood of local bans on such care, and affordability of housing.

This longstanding position of estrangement and negativity has given me an opportunity to think about the practice of philosophy beyond stories of passionate or dispassionate legends, conceptual and argumentative innovations, an incremental set of literatures, and a merit-based sequence of publications and hires. Instead, in this essay I focus on philosophy and academic studies more broadly as a set of complicated circulations.

I understand circulation alongside multiple senses. First, I am considering the work of librarians. Working in-person at a small public library during the initial years of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was primarily stationed on the basement level where books were sent after they had finished their life as New Books on the main floor. Although some were still checked out, a significant amount accumulated dust on the shelves, waiting out their time until a circulation check would lead to their final resting place (usually a dumpster). I found kinship with the afterlife of books as I sat in a basement, removed from circulation on the academic job market, transferring from minimum wage job to minimum wage job and wondering if I'd ever get checked out again. This perspective additionally evokes circulation of the breath, as someone who inhaled COVID-19 early on and recovered from its longer-term effects on the job, gradually learning how to breathe and think again during the following two months.

Considering philosophical literatures from the perspective of library circulation highlights how philosophy spreads. First, the life of philosophical work is not only related to the content of ideas and arguments but also the material vessels, various forms of labor, and social contacts through which these ideas circulate. Some texts live a rich life beyond their authors, getting checked out and remaining in circulation as part of the longer-term life of the discipline. Other texts lose their momentum and fall forgotten, while still others never reach much circulation at all. While circulation may increase or decrease with luck, a significant factor will be the influence that an author is able to leverage to make their work likely to be read. The story of circulation is a story of social position and academic prestige. While merit may be a significant factor in this process, a meritorious argument will remain unread if there is not an initial impetus to pick it up off the physical or electronic shelf and spend the necessary time working with its contents. For this reason, philosophers utilize contemporary tools such as keywords for search engine optimization and algorithms to further enhance the likelihood that their work will receive attention within a vast pool of knowledge and cultural production. Hence, philosophy and specific emerging fields such as trans philosophy are part of a political economics and ecology that differentially circulates various works over time.

A second sense of circulation that motivates my analysis appears in the work of Sara Ahmed. Ahmed is primarily interested in what emotions do: how emotions "circulate between bodies" and how emotions such as hate or disgust "stick" to specific bodies and objects.[1] For Ahmed, the social circulation of emotions generates the affective value of bodies and objects, with increased circulation leading to an increased affective valence.[2] For example, the circulation of speeches in the UK that deploy words such as "flood" or "swamped" becomes the circulation of fear and anxiety as attached to the bodies of potential asylum seekers.[3]

Ahmed primarily works through "the emotionality of texts," through which "texts name or perform different emotions."[4] However, Ahmed also briefly suggests that collections of texts such as archives can have their own affective life through contact with an author such as herself. Ahmed writes,

> An archive is an effect of multiple forms of contact, including institutional forms of contact (with libraries, books, web sites), as well as everyday forms of contact (with friends, families, others). Some forms of contact are presented and authorised through writing (and listed in the references), whilst other forms of contact will be missing, will be erased, even though they may leave their trace. Some everyday forms of contact do appear in my writing: stories which might seem personal, and even about 'my feelings'. As a 'contact writing', or a writing about contact, I do not simply interweave the personal and the public, the individual and the social, but show the ways in which they take shape through each other, or even how they shape each other. So it is not that 'my feelings' are in the writing, even though my writing is littered with stories of how I am shaped by my contact with others.[5]

Ahmed thus indicates that texts and archives, through contact, can become part of the complex life of emotions in circulation. In this essay I consider trans philosophy to be shaped by such a circulation of affect, contact, and political meaning.

Before discussing the circulation of trans philosophy in the profession, it will be helpful to indicate how the above

discussion of circulation can help us better analyze the material and emotional life of texts. We can begin this by considering a comment on the CFP for this very issue of *APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy*. While this may seem like an unusual place to start for an academic, peer-reviewed essay, it indicates the informal life of the discipline and how trans-centered framings of trans philosophy are frequently encountered by non-trans practitioners as a path of faulty inquiry, a problem to be solved, or an approach that should be mocked for daring to take up space in a scholarly venue. The mundane and sensationalized repetition of such framings contributes to the social experience of doing trans philosophy. Additionally, this comment was shared on the official APA News and Announcements page, and hence the comment is conveniently linked directly with a verified APA account. Joseph L. Lombardi writes,

> Usually, philosophers have an interest in presenting both sides of an issue (perhaps, even a professional duty to do so); with the best arguments they can find for each. The title used for the topic that might be doing this makes it hard to believe that this is going to be done: "Trans resistance in times of anti-trans backlash." There are those who may hold that each adult man or woman (if I may use those terms for those with and without a y-chromosome) has a right to decide what happens in and to "his"/"her" body (my pronouns), but may not think it a good idea for anyone to undergo the hormonal and surgical procedures that are involved; that perhaps other approaches, including the possibility of psychotherapy, might be less invasive. Will any of these possibilities be explored in these papers? I didn't think that "colonoscopy" would be involved (the "colonality of cisgender").[6]

First, Lombardi came into contact with the CFP through its material circulation, most likely reaching him through an electronic means. Second, the way that Lombardi has come into contact with the topic of trans people and their relation to philosophy leads him to think not only that there are two distinct sides, but also that "both sides" must always be hosted ("perhaps") for the sake of "professional duty." Lombardi understands the title "Futures of Trans Philosophy" to be contrary to such a framework, and it is his contact with this title that moved him to comment based on his conflicting sense of the topic. Lombardi proceeds to make a vague gesture towards "psychotherapy," which Lombardi takes to be both "less invasive" and mutually exclusive compared to "hormonal and surgical procedures," indicating further ways that Lombardi has come into contact with ideas of trans life and trans medicine. By engaging with the CFP, Lombardi is attempting to recirculate its aim of collecting works on trans philosophy through his vision of how this should professionally proceed.

Most intriguingly, Lombardi misspells "coloniality" as "colonality" to conclude his supposedly professional intervention with a poop joke. While he performs academic neutrality through cumbersome caveats and asides, Lombardi's "colonality" joke helpfully signals a deep affective register to his response. As a scholar of humor, it strikes me that he may be indulging in mirth, attempting to recirculate the CFP by means of humor and ridicule. Such a reading potentially recasts his entire comment as parody, passive aggression, resentment, or some combination thereof. Additionally, Lombardi's emphasis on colons, colonoscopy, and poop may be an attempt to recirculate the CFP in relation to disgust through scatological references or cultural disgust over associations between queer and trans people and anal sex. While I am unable to pin down exactly where Lombardi tried to aim his comments, they do involve an attempted recirculation of the CFP at both a material and affective register.

In what follows, I will use the first section to draw out the contradictory circulations of trans philosophy found in recent writing by Martha Nussbaum, and then expand upon four specific circulations of trans philosophy in the second section. It is only through an attention to these complex circulations that we can grapple with the future of trans philosophy. By analyzing this piece, first, I will explain what I take to be Nussbaum's main claims about "the new trans scholarship." I then draw out contradicting circulations of trans scholarship from Nussbaum's musings on the field by focusing on the depth of the transition memoir, the situation of trans freedom, and the legacy of trans tolerance. I conclude with the modest claim that trans scholarship in philosophy seems to circulate in contradictory ways. Identifying this differential circulation will allow me to expand upon four different circulations with more detail.

2. THE PROFESSOR OF PARITY AND THE NEW TRANS SCHOLARSHIP

The initial place I will focus on to draw out the differential circulation of trans philosophy is a recent series of essays in which philosopher Martha Nussbaum discusses trans scholarship with the comparably prestigious trans economist Deirdre McCloskey. Because it involves a published mutual correspondence rather than a distanced pseudo-engagement such as Peter Singer's curated lectures and journal of controversial ideas (i.e., transgender persons), Nussbaum's engagement stands out as an unparalleled meditation on the state of trans philosophy as a field by one of philosophy's living legends. It is also, as I will point out, a site of deep contradiction.

2.1 NUSSBAUM TO NEW TRANS SCHOLARSHIP

In her short essay "Identity, Equality, Freedom: McCloskey's *Crossing* and the New Trans Scholarship," Martha Nussbaum weighed in on the field of trans philosophy as part of a celebration of trans economist Deirdre McCloskey's new edition of the 1999 transition memoir, *Crossing*. In so doing, Nussbaum provided some reflections on the big questions of trans philosophy, critiqued the illiberalism of the new trans scholars, and brought trans philosophy into conversation with the meaning of the trans memoir. Though Nussbaum's essay is both brief and published as a celebratory correspondence, I will rudely jump into the conversation—after all, there is good precedent for barging in after Kathleen Stock herself jumped into *TSQ* meta-commentary a few years ago.[7]

To begin her laudatory essay, Nussbaum stresses that McCloskey's now-updated memoir is the standard to which

contemporary feminist and transgender scholarship should aspire when considering the nature of gender, womanhood, and trans womanhood or manhood specifically. Nussbaum emphasizes that through its "subtlety and its multifaceted wrestling with the self," McCloskey's memoir comparatively makes articles in journals "look flat," since they lack the depth of soul projected through the memoir form.[8] Nussbaum then considers work on trans existential identity by Talia Bettcher, "one of the most influential and interesting trans scholars," as having a comparative (but understandable) lack of subtlety in describing the particulars of an existential urgency to question and change one's identity in the context of transition.[9] Nussbaum concludes that the memoir style rather than the writings of a trans philosopher gets to the heart of explaining the trans self.

Despite the initial edge that Nussbaum gives to McCloskey's account of her gender journey, she continues to point out that both trans scholars and scholar-memoirists (again understandably) lack a compelling attempt to theorize the mysterious urging etiology of transition. Where "the new trans scholarship" may do a better job, with reference to Robin Dembroff and Catherine Saint-Croix's discussion of agential identity, is in depicting transness in the context of "some sort of commitment to make [one's] self-identification externally available to others."[10] Relating Bettcher's focus on existential identity to this theme, there seems to be a more satisfying alignment between the new trans scholarship and McCloskey's memoir.

Unfortunately, the problem of identity-with-others brings the new trans scholarship to what Nussbaum casts as its egregious problem, most apparent in the response to Rebecca Tuvel's *Hypatia* essay "In Defense of Transracialism." Referring to this as "one of the ugliest and most illiberal examples of 'cancel culture,'" "a true disgrace to philosophy," and "pc craziness," Nussbaum diagnoses a big picture failure of the new trans scholarship to foster a wider tolerance for border crossings.[11] This failure of tolerance highlights McCloskey's outstanding legacy. According to Nussbaum, McCloskey is "a genuine defender of liberal freedom of speech," who "doesn't want to cancel anyone; she wants to think through the mysteries of life, and she favors listening, not canceling."[12] Again, the score is in favor of the memoirist-economist and not the philosophers.

This purported failure of tolerance extends to a larger gap in the "particularly central and interesting" literature of new trans scholarship in contrast to McCloskey's late '90s memoir, involving a failure to think about freedom. Nussbaum emphasizes that what McCloskey has achieved through her journey of *Crossing* is freedom "in the classical liberal sense" and in the sense of existential liberation as "the freedom to be oneself in the world." In contrast to the illiberalism of the new trans scholarship, McCloskey stands out by centering personal freedom to change without punishment or scorn.[13]

Nussbaum ends her toast to McCloskey and the old ways of trans narrative by focusing on the limits of McCloskey's decades-old memoir. Specifically, Nussbaum critiques the silence about power differentials between men and women in *Crossings*, asserting, "[Deirdre] has joined the community of women, so she needs to be in solidarity with them and fight injustice."[14] Nussbaum concludes the essay with optimism that McCloskey's work is helpful for these goals even if not explicit about them, pointing towards a future area for McCloskey to consider and perhaps even for the new trans scholarship as it corrects its past wrongs. Hopefully, one day trans thinkers will read feminism and invest in proper liberalism so that trans scholarship will truly take off!

2.2 NEW TRANS SCHOLARSHIP TO NUSSBAUM

The first dynamic of contradictory circulation that I will point to in Nussbaum's account is the power of the transition memoir to unfold the existential complexities of trans identity. As mentioned earlier, Nussbaum appeals to McCloskey's autobiographical style as a more compelling device for describing the composition of a trans life than Bettcher's peer-reviewed prose.[15] In this context, it is useful to consider how a trans memoir from the late 1990s is intended to circulate compared with a trans philosophy essay. An entire life is more than one can fit in a single book, let alone within a readable one, so a memoir consists of a narrative that can be marketed and distributed. The narrative device of a trans memoir is thus potentially skewed even as it professes to reveal, and frequently truncated to tell a particularly palatable story to a mostly non-trans audience. For this reason, the phenomenon of enticing yet consumable trans subtlety through the memoir form became a significant object of critique for certain schools of mid-2010s trans literary criticism. They argued that older trans memoirs were filtered through a desire to satiate a non-trans public's interest in transition at the expense of a deeper engagement with trans experience and collective meaning.[16]

Initially, it may seem unfair to hastily dismiss older styles through reference to newer styles, much like it would probably be unfair to hastily dismiss a newer body of scholarship through an appeal to older scholarship without significant argumentation. However, it is worth comparing how Janet Mock's *Redefining Realness* from 2014 provides a narrative shift compared to McCloskey's 1999 memoir. Mock narrates her experience as a young trans woman finding herself in the context of Hawaiian identity, economic precarity, and developing her freedom through interactions with other trans and gender diverse people.[17] In comparison, McCloskey's account is mainly focused on the process of her transition, the resulting fallout, and her integration into society with some caveats. Generally, this includes isolation from other trans people.[18] These are all understandable potential limits of a late 1990s trans memoir and for the trajectory of McCloskey's life within a 1990s US social/political situation, but it calls our attention to the fact that this experience is particular and historical rather than universal. The classic liberal freedom offered in McCloskey's new Afterword to *Crossing* and praised by Nussbaum, that of the freedom to independently change your appearance, change your life, keep your upscale professional job, and maintain an expensive loft in downtown Chicago, may not seem like precisely the kind of freedom towards which many in trans scholarship and

beyond are aiming. For example, if I were to theorize trans freedom, I would not be solely interested in a freedom of individual crossings. Instead, I think trans freedom must center the capability to have a collective life in public space, which is precisely what makes trans freedom so difficult because the entrenched ideological and institutional arrangement has insisted that we are a threat to public and professional spaces. Furthermore, this interaction in public space must include the capability to interact with other trans people rather than the imposed deep stealth of past gender clinics.[19]

This contrast draws out an element of Bettcher's work that Nussbaum glosses over. Bettcher's analysis of how trans people negotiate existential identity is grounded in observations of trans people expressing identity among other trans people within particular trans communities. Bettcher is philosophically interested in how trans people among other trans people claim and enact their identity with each other, rather than constricting herself to a universalized situation of identity that is filtered for people unfamiliar with trans experience who endeavor to understand trans others.[20] In contrast, such a meditation on the meaning of identity in the context of interactions with particular trans people over a long period of time is lacking from *Crossing* or its new Afterword. Considered further, the value of depth as attributed to McCloskey in contrast to Bettcher seems to not be so straightforward or value neutral, and we may even hesitate when Nussbaum favors the trans memoir over all other approaches in trans scholarship, each weighed according to her interest. McCloskey herself suggests that Nussbaum's interpretation is skewed by focusing too much on McCloskey's relationship with women's clothes.[21]

Nussbaum's evaluation hinges upon a circulation of McCloskey's text as capable of a depth unattainable by the new trans scholarship. And yet, McCloskey's style of memoir simultaneously circulates as lacking in depth because of its historical situation as a consumable tell-all that courts the attention of non-trans audiences. In this context, it is useful to consider Nussbaum's fascination with the mystery of trans etiology, since this seems to motivate her deployment of the text in relation to the new trans scholarship.[22] As a contrast, much of 2010s trans literary criticism sought a more grounded and collective account of trans experience that is not tethered to such non-trans fascination. In this context, Bettcher's emphasis on a grounded and connected practice of trans thinking circulates as the deeper account rather than as austerely inattentive to etiology. Such a dynamic reveals the complicated and often contradicting ways of circulating a trans text or body of scholarship.

Second, it is worthwhile to consider Nussbaum's insistence that McCloskey has never been associated with the kind of "canceling" engaged in by the new trans scholarship. Granting McCloskey a pedestal over "a larger portion of the trans scholarly community," Nussbaum emphasizes that she tolerates differences and refuses to shut down or silence positions and persons that she disagrees with.[23] Compare this with a characterization of McCloskey's actions by Alice Dreger from 2008 in *Archives of Sexual Behavior*:

> But all of the noise of the accusations did what I suspect Conway, James, and McCloskey hoped: It distracted attention from the book's message—that Blanchard's theory of MTF transsexualism was right—by apparently killing the messenger. Indeed, much as Bailey would prefer not to admit it, in their leadership of the backlash against *TMWWBQ*, Lynn Conway, Andrea James, and Deirdre McCloskey came remarkably close to effectively destroying J. Michael Bailey's reputation and life.[24]

To add some context for those who are not familiar with a topic of central interest in 2000s public trans discourse *du jour*: Dreger was objecting to efforts by McCloskey, engineer and computer scientist Lynn Conway, and others to criticize and seek consequences for J. Michael Bailey's book *The Man Who Would be Queen*. In a letter written to Northwestern University in 2003, McCloskey and Conway made a formal complaint that the book was the result of unethical research practices designed to cook up a pseudo-scientific classificatory system that would be used to defame gender-variant people.[25] This also marks a key context in which McCloskey worked in concert with other trans people. In response, Dreger characterized McCloskey's actions as an illiberal attempt to censor Bailey and ruin his life.

Through Nussbaum and Dreger we receive two different circulations of McCloskey's reputation, both as someone who would never cancel anyone and as an inexcusable killer of theories and destroyer of researchers' lives. McCloskey is not directly associated with a vague phenomenon called "cancel culture" in the way of the new trans scholarship, but this would have been impossible because the phrase "cancel culture" had not yet been recirculated from its earlier social justice activist context into a phrase of media and state frenzy.[26]

Though the challenges presented by McCloskey et al. against the Bailey book are different from those presented against the *Hypatia* essay, it is worthwhile to consider McCloskey's own understanding about the relationship between freedom of speech and complaints. McCloskey wrote,

> "The big issue" for you is free speech. In what way have I or anyone else in this debate abridged anyone's free speech? We aren't the government. It's just confused to identify published complaints by private citizens about someone—justified in this case, but let's for the moment set the issue of the merits aside—with censorship or some other governmental act in violation of "free speech." . . . In what does our great power lie? Professor Bailey, like us, is a senior, tenured professor. We objected to his work and to his behavior, through our writings and through channels. What exactly is the exercise of "great power" there? Isn't this power called "the power of the pen," and isn't that exactly the "free speech" you believe you are so courageously defending?[27]

Here we have several different circulations of tolerance, cancel culture, vulnerable and destroyed lives, the power to oppress, and freedom of speech, in relation to the same person. In one account, McCloskey is the tolerant listener and measured critic who never cancels because she is not associated with the new trans scholarship and its *Hypatia* letter, critiques, and cacophony. In another account, McCloskey is the intolerant, close-minded complainer who offers incendiary and unjustified threats because she is associated with the Bailey letter, critiques, and cacophony. And in yet another account, McCloskey's letter, critiques, and cacophony comprises exactly that free speech which she is accused of threatening, all located in the sphere of free and open discussion without government intervention.

Vis-à-vis McCloskey, trans liberalism and trans illiberalism circulate differently in different contexts. Again, this makes referring to McCloskey's work as a standard by which to judge "the new trans scholarship" vexing without further precision. It also raises questions about the means through which the illiberalism of "the new trans scholarship" itself has circulated. Does all trans scholarship in philosophy and beyond risk such illiberalism, or is it only particular projects, or simply a specific blunder? Referencing a vague quantity of participants makes it unclear who was at fault and why, what precisely constituted an excess, and what the comparative balances of freedom and capability were like in the various trans scholarship controversies of the past and beyond. Diagnosing the "new trans scholarship" in such a fashion is perhaps a dismissive smear, though I would hesitate to call it defamation (I'm not very litigious).

Additionally, Nussbaum's characterization of this amalgamated "new trans scholarship" seems to be arrested on one moment from four years before she published the essay that does not include the many ways that trans philosophy has expanded its circulation throughout the profession beyond the *Hypatia* situation. For example, definitions of new trans scholarship in 2024 potentially include Kathleen Stock, Holly Lawford-Smith, Tomas Bogardus, and Alex Byrne, with Stock standing above the rest as a bona-fide Orderly public intellectual in the UK. This new trans scholarship is certainly interested in questions of transness and freedom, as well as the meaning of gender and trans manhood and womanhood. Would Nussbaum consider them to be fulfilling the mission of freedom, not fulfilling it, or something else? Is this emerging set of characters a justified response to the illiberal PC crowd of the new yesterday? Stock and McCloskey are even directly connected, having both taught and debated at the University of Austin Summer School.[28] Although Nussbaum's silence on the newest of the new trans scholarship could be circulated as yet another slight against them, it stands out to me that it also could be a hesitancy or a lack of spotlight that permits the freedom to pass by unconsidered. Each of these interpretations may circulate differently according to one's limited understanding of Nussbaum as scholar and person.

Nussbaum's confusing characterization of trans philosophy illustrates that trans philosophy is circulated differently in different contexts. In the second section, I will track four specific ways through which this circulation occurs, concluding with a future-bound fifth suggestion.

3. FOUR CIRCULATIONS OF "TRANS PHILOSOPHY"

To better understand trans philosophy in its circulations, it is helpful to begin by consulting influential essays in the field. In "What is Trans Philosophy?" Talia Bettcher describes a practice of philosophy that emerges from everyday trans experience as it is "shot through with perplexity [and] shot through with WTF questions."[29] In this context, trans philosophy stands out as a distinct process through which trans people philosophize without the formal institutional channels and hazing rituals of academic philosophy. Already rooted in this place of WTF, Bettcher sees the potential contributions of philosophy as "primarily constructive, positive, illuminating, and orienting," providing a means to clarify the tumultuous everyday experiences of living a transed life.[30] Drawing from the resources of this "ground-bound" social location, Bettcher asks, "What else does one have to draw on that could provide the worldly perception necessary for life-affirming, rather than suicidal, philosophical illuminations?"[31] How do you theorize about your life and the life of a community without killing it in the process?

For Bettcher, a trans philosophy proceeds from an awareness of "pretheoretical sociality among trans people," and an "embeddedness in trans subcultures" that includes intimate familiarity with "trans discursive and nondiscursive practices."[32] Trans philosophy frequently centers questions about violence and responses to violence, but is not fully trapped within this necropolitical loop[33] because it is also concerned with the collective life of trans thinking. In Bettcher's view, the meaning of trans philosophy and any practice of philosophy that focuses on the meaning of trans phenomena, which I will further distinguish below, is shaped by the work that it does. This includes the questions that philosophy asks, the cultural understandings that philosophy includes or brackets out, and the ends that philosophy serves.[34] Considering the historical and political situation of such thinking is not simply a political distraction from the real meat and potatoes of philosophy, but instead part of reaching a deeper understanding of how philosophy is and ought to be practiced.

Alongside her ground-bound conception of trans philosophy, Bettcher acknowledges that philosophers have often been tempted to refer to trans experience as a resource for other philosophical endeavors, through a mistaken approach she calls "pristine philosophy"; this results in "philosophizing trans" rather than trans philosophy.[35] Such a perspective mines trans experience from afar, masks intuitions borrowed from dominant culture as necessary universal intuitions, and brackets out life and death matters of importance to trans people.[36] Bettcher thus emphasizes that trans experience is taken up in different ways within the discipline of philosophy. In what follows, I will build on Bettcher's account to explain four of the ways through which trans philosophy circulates.

3.1 TRANS PHILOSOPHY AS CREATING TRANS SPACE

The circulation of "trans philosophy" has shifted with the politics of the past few years, nurtured by the politics of trans life and the practice of philosophy from decades prior. Building on Bettcher's description of a ground-bound practice of philosophy in connection with other trans people that can clear a distinct space for inquiry,[37] I think of my participation starting in 2015 and beyond with trans philosophy conferences and publications. These were the moments when many of us moved from isolated scholarship to a more collective sense of our work in this profession. In the mid to late 2010s, I found that these conferences and journal issues created a space where trans scholars and non-trans scholars interested in doing scholarship *with* trans people as welcomed colleagues could share their ideas and meet each other in physical or virtual space. Creating these rare interpersonal spaces of discussion also forges social architectures to support trans philosophy, trans philosophers, and trans thought more broadly. Such a practice goes against the grain of most philosophy departments that will likely never hire any kind of trans professor, let alone to do the work of trans philosophy.

In this context, the circulation of trans philosophy, as indicated by Bettcher, is a space of collective, but not uncritical or coddling, care and community building. It also centers a production of writing and thought that is frequently more attuned to the minute and complex details of everyday trans life than other spaces can afford. ***The first circulation of trans philosophy is the circulation of a space where trans philosophers as colleagues participating in philosophical deliberation can have their lives and ideas centered, or at the very least respectfully taken into account, supporting the development of a robust ground-bound philosophy***. I attribute to this definition some flexibility, as the tools, methods, and topics of this trans philosophy have yet to be established, especially as there are so few tenured trans philosophers who can receive job security and a living wage for their research. The precarious condition of academia and its job market, the comparatively low number of trans people seeking professional philosophy degrees and appointments, and the even lower number of trans people who can sustain themselves long-term in professional philosophy highly impacts this area of study and its future, if there is to be one.

3.2 THE TRANS QUESTION

The circulation of trans philosophy in a second sense extends long before the moment of the 2016 trans philosophy conference, and is likely to continue into the following decade, surviving the ongoing crumbling of academic institutions and their adaptations into austerity or direct tools of anti-trans statecraft. I first encountered this style of trans philosophy in person during an undergraduate course on the history of philosophy in 2008. I had come out as trans as a teenager but was generally not open with my classmates about being trans during college, so I was known by many of my peers and professors as a non-trans woman. In academic philosophy this was itself an ordeal that was fortunately mitigated by an explicitly feminist undergraduate philosophy department. The class centered on the ship of Theseus puzzle, considering the questions of (1) does replacing rotting planks in Theseus's famous ship eventually make it a fundamentally different ship, and (2) if so, when did it become a different ship? Another undergraduate student, extending his curiosity from the ancients to more contemporary questions of personal identity and technology, asked if a man who undergoes a sex change to become a woman should now be considered a fundamentally different person. The professor handled the resulting discussion about as well as any professor given an unexpected question outside their area of expertise by a brainstorming student could be expected to do. It struck me while sitting in the classroom that I was suddenly reconfigured by my peers as some distant object of curiosity, displaced as both student and puzzle.

Due to the relatively few opportunities to actually meet trans people and learn about us in the profession, this practice continues to be the main circulation of trans philosophy in our area of work, its media coverage, its professional chatter system, and its formal networks. That is, when the words "trans" and "philosophy" are collected together in the profession of philosophy, it tends to be the focus on trans people as an object of curiosity, fascination, conjecture, study, debate, and analysis—which Bettcher emphasizes is a political situation rather than philosophy simply running its neutral course. Here, I take up the phrasing of "the trans question" both to connect this circulation with the insights of Viviane Namaste on research ethics[38] and to highlight the increasing circulation of a phrase[39] that frames a group of people as a problem to be solved, subjugated, or eliminated. ***The second circulation of trans philosophy is the continued entrenchment of a space where non-trans philosophers can have their questions, concerns, and curiosity centered and elevated over trans people, who are primarily a questionable object of debate and should not interfere with this debate due to inherent bias. Trans people may be allowed to engage but only on the terms set by non-trans people, well-intentioned or otherwise.***

This circulation of trans philosophy has largely been handed off to the self-identified gender-critical philosophers and other professionals jumping on deck to correct the leakage of trans into mainstream philosophy. In this context, we can consider the rise of *The Journal of Controversial Ideas*, which has benefited from the magnification of the trans debacle and typically devotes several essays to its version of trans philosophy in every issue. Excluding editorials, about 34 percent of the journal's essays discuss the topic as of this writing. Where once there was a history of debate between trans and trans-exclusionary scholars that led to the development of trans studies as a field and a reconciliation with feminist philosophy, now there is an ahistorical version of Bonnie Mann who never updated her views about trans-exclusionary separatism, along with a pristine landscape largely devoid of Sandy Stones, Susan Strykers, and Emi Koyamas.[40] Likewise, discussions about the supposedly baffling attractiveness of trans people can avoid researching how medical transition usually works by framing it as purely external or exogenous rather than as interactive with an endogenous human endocrine system.[41]

Even when this is acknowledged, critics can make grandiose claims that exogenous hormones are qualitatively different if they do not achieve comparable results in merely one year, which is an even weaker appeal when considering that hormones are typically slowly raised to full dosage over that time period.[42] The continued magnification of gender-critical and transgender-curious scholars through appeals to being silenced and their cancellation in the form of a demand for subscription has largely overshadowed the first circulation of trans philosophy. Compared to media and academic coverage of the *Hypatia* controversy, or the institutionally sanctioned giant neon sign of the "erased" gender-critical philosophers, the development of trans philosophy centering trans people has received comparatively little interest—with interest meaning not just attention but also money.

Mainstream philosophy has largely ignored the subject of trans people or placed us into footnotes until the mid-2010s, but now that it has become of professional interest it must be defended as a subject area for non-trans philosophers (meaning *real* philosophers) to define. Prestige and propriety still count as first philosophy, so perhaps one or two trans people will be able to enter the conversation if they have a position at, say, Yale. Earlier demands that trans philosophers create a literature to establish that trans perspectives are properly philosophical later become demands that trans philosophers stop oppressing non-trans philosophers by expecting them to engage with it. Even responses and criticisms focused on gender-critical philosophers, though well-meaning and appreciated, tend to be tethered to this second circulation of trans philosophy, further entrenching the silence around the supposedly totalitarian approach of trans-centered philosophy. In this context, the WTF questions of trans philosophy are gutted of their innards and removed from their living context to be displayed like preserved beetles in a museum. Trans identity, anti-trans violence, trans community, trans rights, trans participation in public life, and trans history now become perpetually novel defendants in the courtroom of philosophical inquiry, to the benefit of Mediums, Quillettes, and Elseviers alike.

3.3 THE GENDER WARS

The tension between these two meanings of trans philosophy has led to a third understanding of trans philosophy as primarily a continuous source of drama, unruliness, strife, and breakdown. ***We arrive at the third circulation of trans philosophy as a heated and uncomfortable philosophical calamity.*** When the second circulation of trans philosophy displaces the first circulation of trans philosophy, the third circulation of trans philosophy is often chosen by uncertain, wary, or unfamiliar participants in the profession who do not want to explicitly weigh in on what is now framed through the contradictory metaphors of "the trans debate" and "the gender wars." This framework may also refer to the stress and turmoil faced by gender-critical philosophers and trans philosophers, with the former increasingly arranged under the heading of threatened academic freedom, and the latter increasingly lumped together as manipulative appeals to emotion, bias of standpoint, and a threat to academic freedom. The third meaning of trans philosophy can motivate engagement or disengagement, including responses such as trying to intervene in the tone of the discussion through a vague open letter from afar, lamenting the civility or tone among peers online and offline, staying "neutral" in public while justifying this to affected colleagues in private through reference to the heated lack of agreement, or more indirectly ghosting colleagues and students who are inconveniently tarnished by their proximity to the firepit. Conflict, regardless of the context, comes to be read as abuse or as authoritarianism.[43] From a vantage point far away, trans philosophy can be framed as a total meltdown situation to be avoided or stoked for professional convenience. Engage or disengage at your leisure.

3.4 THE TRANS CULT

The re-eclipsing of trans-centered philosophy by non-trans trans philosophy, with the production of the third circulation of trans philosophy as calamity, has an unbalanced impact on the continued political economics of trans philosophy. Trans philosophy is not an apolitical subfield, although the second circulation of trans philosophy depends on a one-sided framework of depoliticization to shield itself. Instead, trans philosophy takes on intensified political forms as it is elevated into a publishable academic enterprise at the same time that academic austerity dips the scholar's processional robes further into the paper shredder. Ceaseless controversy, chaotic and inflamed by the continued tendency of professionalized philosophers sticking their heads under the earth of the φροντιστήριον at the first sign of trouble, is displaced onto the body of the trans person and hence the trans scholar as the source of unwanted turmoil.[44] ***This feeds into a fourth circulation of trans philosophy as an irrational, inflamed, and potentially dangerous ideology beckoned by trans people, perhaps even in the form of a conspiracy, lobby, or cult.*** Objecting to getting characterized as a dangerously insane threat to society that should be removed from public spaces is now a vexatious complaint by a mob fueled by powerful interests, while objecting to getting called a bigot is now a courageous grassroots defense of protected beliefs from ideologically captured and hostile work environments. Trans people in general can now be dismissed as "*those people*."[45] An anonymous comment on a posted excerpt from Alex Byrne's *Trouble with Gender* on *Quillette* reads,

> Personally I'm tired of the whole trans thing—it leaves me, well, tired out, disinterested. "Disinterested" in the sense that whatever slight interest I might once have had—along with compassion—has kind of been pounded out of existence by the repetitious (ceaseless?) drumming on this topic. I wish it would just go away, and I feel like I wish these folks would just go away.[46]

These folks are the perpetually unexamined ones who have never been brought to account and who ultimately aim to dismantle Galileo's telescope and salt over the common ground of public understanding. The trans cultists are inherently unruly, biased, subjective, and emotional, uniquely resilient to the light of nature and the correspondence between statements about the world

and its clear and distinct truth. They are also dangerous in shared spaces and should be avoided when possible. Did you hear they occasionally write inflammatory and unprofessional polemics?

How does the profession proceed when trans philosophy is suddenly in demand but trans philosophers embody the unruliness of heated conflict? The inertia for the discipline, which is already unable to sustain any of its practitioners, is simple: let the trans philosophers wither away. Ignore the prevalence of transphobia in the institutions that materially produce the life of the academy; better yet, conjure a dichotomy between any mention of transphobia and freedom of inquiry; even better, promote open discussion by bracketing out considerations of transphobia in philosophy as "cruel and abusive."[47] Elevate the silenced non-trans philosophers of trans philosophy through the chatter network of blogs, give them prestigious lectures and publications in places that would never touch the work of trans scholars, and give them secure jobs and promotions and titles. Above all, never stop describing them as silenced or scrutinize what "silenced" or "canceled" means. When a gender-critical scholar leaves the academy it is world-historical, and when a trans scholar leaves it is unremarkable.

Align the work of non-trans philosophers in philosophy with the metaphors of repairing or sobering the controversy, clipping the unruly dandelions. Tether all discussions of open inquiry to an abstract "right" to hold any academic debate without acknowledging that trans scholars are not and have not historically been sustained by the academy, and without questioning to what extent the abstract right to hold any academic debate is rendered meaningless by such conditions. Deploy vague and unfalsifiable accusations of "identity politics," "virtue-signaling," "moral grandstanding," and unreflective or insincere "wokeness" gone too far to obscure the material insecurity of the voices you are overriding. Never question scholars you agree with on these grounds. Hold inconsistent views about swearing, mocking, and their relationship to abuse and so-called "professionalism." Above all, do not examine yourself—examination is for others!—do not interrogate your stakes, do not seek consistency, and do not investigate the representations of trans people that may have influenced your view of us prior to the mid-2000s or 2010s. Allow the discussion of trans people to continuously refresh itself on your terms, the trans person hoisted up as a forever emerging figure of outsider tension approaching the rational professional philosopher who has no history with transphobic institutions or culture. When trans philosophers ask why you do not engage with their work to the same extent you might with other philosophers, stand the meaning of "gatekeepers" upside down while comfortably seated inside your academic office. Repeat this with the phrase "safe space."

There is a smaller scope to the multiplication of trans philosophy that could get us caught in the illusion that transphobia in philosophy lies on a horizontal field, as if another open letter or another outraged blog post blasting outraged "wokescolds" will roll the stone of discourse to a desired incline. Such back-and-forth reactive participation is understandable when focused on exposing bigotry and its sophistry, but continues to eclipse trans philosophy in the first sense without materially supporting its continued work. We thus risk playing into the constant reset that trans philosophy is institutionally subjected to under its conditions of precarity and the ways this discipline can coast on an easy one-sided process of examination.

4. FOREWORD TO MORE TRANS PHILOSOPHY

In this polemic I have focused on circulation as a means of evaluating the complexity within which trans philosophy is currently situated. Building on some co-written meditations with Cassius Adair and Cameron Awkward-Rich that we undertook in the context of trans studies,[48] I take trans philosophy to be a field that has yet to clearly form as it continues to twist and multiply according to affect, professional dynamics, political intrigue, who gets thrown away, and who is granted the space, time, energy, and money to write and publish. By continuing to sort through these nebulous dynamics, I hope to better understand how to navigate trans philosophy in its circulation as what Talia Bettcher calls ground-bound philosophy, a means within which trans people can create at least one space where we are listened to, respected, and permitted relationality as connected with deep thinking. This is the future and the sense of freedom that I seek even if it turns out that philosophy as an institutionalized profession or the academy is not the best location for such work.

Retiring from the polemic style, I am drawn again to Bettcher's emphasis on ground-bound philosophy, which is where I think the most exciting kernels of trans thinking happen. The best response to uneven circulations of trans philosophy in the profession is our own circulation of care and support on the ground, in the spaces where love of wisdom and love of mutual aid intersect. We are at our best when we don't let this discipline make us too defensive, when we're having good conversations with friends over coffee, and when we don't get too hung up on establishing this thing we're doing as "real philosophy" (which is a losing game). In this context ***I propose a continued fifth circulation of trans philosophy, which is trans and non-trans philosophers doing what we can to support trans thought within and beyond the academy, taking action for trans people to be better housed and fed, less constrained by violence and threats from the state, less disposable, and welcomed to conversation.***

NOTES

1. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, 4 and 14.
2. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, 45.
3. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, 46.
4. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, 13.
5. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, 14.
6. Lombardi, August 25, 2023.
7. Stock, *Material Girls*, 9.
8. Nussbaum, "Identity, Equality, Freedom," 271.
9. Nussbaum, "Identity, Equality, Freedom," 277.
10. Nussbaum, "Identity, Equality, Freedom," 278.
11. Nussbaum, "Identity, Equality, Freedom," 278–79.

12. Nussbaum, "Identity, Equality, Freedom," 279.
13. Nussbaum, "Identity, Equality, Freedom," 279–80.
14. Nussbaum, "Identity, Equality, Freedom," 281.
15. Nussbaum, "Identity, Equality, Freedom," 277.
16. See Cross, "Know & Tell" ; Plett, "Rise of the Gender Novel"; Fleischmann and Peters, "T Clutch Fleischmann and Torrey Peters on Trans Essays."
17. Mock, *Redefining Realness*.
18. McCloskey, *Crossing*.
19. Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back."
20. Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of 'Woman,'" 235.
21. McCloskey, "On Agreeing with Martha Nussbaum," 3.
22. Nussbaum, "Identity, Equality, Freedom," 277.
23. Nussbaum, "Identity, Equality, Freedom," 279.
24. Dreger, "The Controversy Surrounding the Man Who Would Be Queen," 412.
25. McCloskey and Conway, "Deirdre McCloskey and Lynn Conway File Formal Complaint with the Vice-President of Research of Northwestern University regarding the research conduct of J. Michael Bailey."
26. See brown, "we will not cancel us."
27. McCloskey, "McCloskey's Back-and-Forth with Seth Roberts on the Bailey Controversy." I am thankful to Jackie Ess for first introducing me to this quote.
28. University of Austin, "Stock & McCloskey Debate Issues of Sex, Gender, & Identity."
29. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 651
30. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 651–52.
31. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 656.
32. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 656.
33. See Snorton and Haritaworn, "Trans Necropolitics."
34. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 660.
35. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 652.
36. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 656–57 and 659.
37. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 660.
38. Namaste, "Undoing Theory."
39. See Butler, "Labour Must Clarify Its Policy on Transgender Issues to Win the Next Election."
40. Phelan and Lawford-Smith, "Feminist Separatism Revisited"; Mann, "For a *Critical* Radical Feminism"; Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back"; Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix"; Koyama, "Whose Feminism Is It Anyway?"
41. Halwani, "Sex and Sexual Orientation, Gender and Sexual Preference," 3.
42. Stock, *Material Girls*, 74.
43. Schulman, *Conflict Is Not Abuse*; DuFord, *Solidarity in Conflict*.
44. For more on philosophers and the φροντιστήριον / *phrontistḗrion* consult *Clouds* by Aristophanes. Aristophanes, *Aristophanes 1*.
45. Joyce, "Wine with Women," 4:12–5:58.
46. Anonymous, January 2024.
47. 12 Leading Scholars, "Philosophers Should Not Be Sanctioned Over Their Positions on Sex and Gender."
48. Adair, Awkward-Rich, and Marvin, "Before Trans Studies."

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Sovereign: A Defense of the Modified Body

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Feminists have rightly critiqued social pressures to modify one's body, particularly as they confront cis women. However, an anti-body-modification stance is ultimately inadequate for the liberatory ends to which feminism aspires. Body modification plays a crucial role in making trans lives liveable, and an ethics of body modification must grapple with this fact.

I begin by examining an anti-body-modification principle called the Principle of the Unmodified Body, drawn from Clare Chambers's 2022 book, *Intact*. This principle has intuitive appeal, and successfully explains what is wrong in some cases of sexist oppression, but fails badly when called upon to address trans people's realities. I diagnose why and how the principle fails, and I propose an alternative Principle of the Hospitable Body, which enables us to critique transphobic oppression, as well as the cases of sexist oppression that the Principle of the Unmodified Body was originally designed to explain.

Moreover, the Principle of the Hospitable Body is an improvement even within the domain that the Principle of the Unmodified Body was originally designed to explain. Unlike the Principle of the Unmodified Body, it can provide an adequate account of birth control, which is crucially important to cis women, as well as many trans men and nonbinary people.

1. THE PRINCIPLE OF THE UNMODIFIED BODY

Oppressive pressures to modify one's body are ubiquitous. Racist and sexist beauty standards call on women to straighten their hair,[1] lighten their skin,[2] and even change their facial features through cosmetic surgery.[3] Intersex infants are subjected to damaging genital surgeries for cosmetic ends,[4] and non-intersex children in many places are routinely subjected to genital cutting.[5] Fat people face discrimination along multiple axes[6] and are often advised to lose weight as a solution to their problems (sometimes in lieu of receiving medical attention).[7] Fatphobic micro-aggressions create constant pressure on even thin people to monitor their weight.[8]

All of this deserves our censure and our pushback. Why are our bodies not fine as they are? It is tempting to respond by thinking that there is something objectionable or suboptimal about body modification in general. Of course, such opposition to body modification should avoid falling into any of three overly simplistic errors. It should avoid naturalizing assumptions, by acknowledging that the concept of a modified body is inherently socially constructed. It should avoid overly individualistic analysis, by critiquing social systems rather than blaming individuals for responding rationally to their incentives. And it should avoid universal and sweeping condemnation, by acknowledging that some forms of body modification are, all things considered, valuable.

I will argue that even a sophisticated anti-body-modification stance is inadequate, both for transfeminist ends, and in the cis feminist context that initially made the idea seem tempting. I will do this by arguing against the principle that Clare Chambers articulates in her book *Intact*:

> **The Principle of the Unmodified Body**: "*your body is good enough just as it is* because your body is *you*, and your body is *yours*, and *you* have an inalienable value that all others must recognize and respect."[9]

This principle avoids all three of the simplistic mistakes that I have decried. Chambers explicitly notes that what counts as a modification, or what counts as a natural, healthy, normal, or whole body is essentially political and contested. Throughout the book, she reminds us that the purpose of the principle is not to denigrate individuals who modify their bodies, but to oppose social pressures to modify one's body for the convenience, comfort, or aesthetic pleasure of others. And she offers specific examples of valuable modification: post-mastectomy tattoos that help women reclaim their bodies after breast cancer, artists' use of tattoos and plastic surgery as a form of self-expression, C-sections in situations that call for them (for example, when they make the birth safer for babies and birthing parents), and treatments like chemotherapy, heart surgery, and resuscitation.

In addition to being sophisticated, the Principle of the Unmodified Body is useful and generative in many cases. It provides ammunition for critiquing many of the injustices linked to pressure to modify one's body. Chambers applies it to prejudices against natural Black hair,[10] routine infant

circumcision,[11] pressures to beautify oneself with cosmetic surgery,[12] the "shametainence" demands of a culture that expects women not only to do the work of managing menstruation or wearing makeup, but to conceal this work from others,[13] and a variety of other questionable social structures.

Thus, the Principle of the Unmodified Body presents the anti-body-modification view at its best. Nonetheless, the Principle of the Unmodified Body is completely inadequate for making sense of trans experience, as Chambers's own attempts to apply it show. The problem is not simply that Chambers has misapplied the principle by borrowing extraneous transphobic assumptions from the wider culture without criticizing them (although many of her auxiliary premises do deserve serious scrutiny). Rather, the principle itself is fundamentally inadequate.

2. CHAMBERS ON TRANS BODIES

Pressure to modify is the main lens through which Chambers interprets trans experience. She mentions transgender people as a group that faces disproportionate pressure to modify their bodies, along with "[w]omen and girls . . . adolescents, sexual minority groups, and people with larger or heavier bodies."[14] Her brief discussion of chest binding among transmasculine people treats it as a costly way of escaping oppressive models of femininity, fraught with physical risks and inconveniences, which would not be necessary if femininity were not so heavily punished.[15] But her most detailed discussion of trans bodies occurs in Chapter 8, where she discusses trans adults, and Chapter 9, where she discusses trans adolescents.

2.1 TRANS ADULTS

Chambers uses the Principle of the Unmodified body to argue for unsettlingly conservative conclusions: at an individual level, we should exercise caution about seeking or providing transition-related care, to the extent that insurance should not cover these procedures. And at the societal level, we should "work together to reject the idea that body modification is necessary to fit in."[16]

This is because a view that sees body modification as invariably an imposition from the outside, one that compromises individual integrity and autonomy, cannot adequately explain why it is so valuable for alleviating dysphoria. After rejecting the "born in the wrong body" model, which attributes dysphoria to the presence of an authentic inner self that does not match one's outward physical shape, Chambers concludes that dysphoria must be caused by the social pressures of a society that makes unjustified demands on all of our bodies. So far, so good; Chambers is following a tradition of trans scholarship that includes Kate Bornstein and Pat Califia, whom she cites, as well as authors like Sandy Stone, Dean Spade, and Miquel Missé, whom she does not.[17] How do we get from here to declining insurance coverage for medical transition?

The problem is the Principle of the Unmodified Body. If dysphoria is the result of growing up in a society that fails to accept "the logic of the unmodified body," then the solution is to collectively embrace that logic: "Your real self is whoever you actually are, right now, including what your body is like. You do not need to do any work to be truly you. You are already you, and you always will be."[18] To medically transition is to give in to social pressure, while to refuse medical transition is to resist.

But this simple picture of capitulation and resistance fails to address the realities of many trans people. Self-declared gender outlaw Kate Bornstein has been open about seeking body modifications to relieve dysphoria—a fact that Chambers has to dismiss as inconsistent, claiming that Bornstein rejects dominant gender norms in political terms but feels compelled to submit to them in personal terms.[19] But once we have rejected the idea of an authentic inner self, it is not clear why we should see the choice to modify as capitulation. Trans people are subject to a variety of contradictory pressures, including strong pressures against modification, and doing nothing is often the path of least resistance.

Interviews with ordinary trans people also raise trouble for the view that modification is capitulation. Many are critical of both the "born in the wrong body" narrative and dominant gender norms, and in fact see them as closely linked. As MacDonald et al. write in a study of transmasculine people's experiences of pregnancy and lactation, "Proponents of [the "born in the wrong body"] narrative give the impression that transgender people want to change all aspects of themselves to conform absolutely to the opposite traditional gender role and physical sex from what they were assigned at birth, an assumption that would logically exclude transmasculine bodies from the realm of pregnancy and lactation."[20] Study participants did not share this view. They saw their medical providers' attachment to the "born in the wrong body" model and its associated binary gender norms as a challenge to be navigated around. One participant, Kai, reported that after surgery, his doctor "was just like, 'Oh yeah, you're the guy trapped in a girl's body, and now your body matches how you feel inside.' And I was like, 'Uh, yeah, sure, thanks, I'll take my new chest now and go.'"[21]

The Principle of the Unmodified Body may not judge or blame anyone for seeking trans healthcare, but it does not provide us with the resources to explain why trans healthcare is valuable, why barriers to access constitute a type of injustice, or why we should fight back against those barriers.

2.2 TRANS ADOLESCENTS

In Chapter 9, Chambers applies the Principle of the Unmodified Body to the question of trans healthcare for minors (in the context of discussing body modification for children). She considers the case of Luna Younger, a seven-year-old trans girl in Texas whose custody battle made national news when her parents disagreed over whether to let her socially transition.[22] Chambers asks: Should Luna (once she is old enough for it to matter) take puberty blockers?

She considers three principles we might use to answer the question—a principle of autonomy, which says we should let people make autonomous decisions about their bodies; a principle of the open future, which says we should avoid

making irreversible changes; and a principle which says we should choose interventions that serve children's best interests—and argues that none of them straightforwardly applies. Having no other principle to guide us, she says, we should fall back on the Principle of the Unmodified Body. "In hard cases such as these," she writes, "bodily integrity means ruling in favor of non-modification."[23]

It is not at all obvious to me that these principles fall silent,[24] but even granting that they do, the Principle of the Unmodified Body is not an adequate tie-breaker. The Principle of the Unmodified Body fails to capture a crucial moral consideration, and one that we in fact have access to: Luna's point of view.[25] Of course, it would be wrong to put Luna through an estrogen-dominant puberty because an outsider interpreted her behavior as feminine, but it would be equally wrong to withhold puberty blockers based on the assumption that a modified trans body is a terrible thing. A young adolescent is capable of expressing feelings and opinions about her own body; any adequate principle should be responsive to what those feelings and opinions *are*.

3. WHAT'S MISSING?

The Principle of the Unmodified Body is an attempt to address social forces that drive political and social inequality. It responds to the fact that many people (especially cis women and girls) are often pressured to modify their bodies as a form of social control.

And it is true that trans people are sometimes pressured into body modification. Ambiguous bodies are singled out for ridicule and violence. Genital surgery and hormone treatments are sometimes required as a precondition for changing one's gender on legal documents,[26] or for competing in women's sports.[27] Many trans people struggle with, and internalize, an ideology that assumes that all medical transition aims at cis standards of passing and beauty.[28]

But if we focus exclusively on pressures to modify, we will overlook the intense pressure on trans people *not* to modify, typically on the grounds that modification makes cis people uncomfortable. I now turn to an overview of those pressures.

3.1 THE PRESSURE NOT TO MODIFY

As I write this, anti-trans political forces are mobilizing throughout the Anglophone world. Conservatives in the US embrace openly eliminationist rhetoric,[29] but their ideas have been taken up elsewhere—for instance, by a vocal anti-trans lobby in the UK that portrays trans women as dangerous predators, while claiming to be concerned with "free speech."[30] The prevalence of anti-trans hate speech in UK media has raised concern from international commentators.[31]

Anti-trans tactics are numerous and varied. They include bathroom bills,[32] drag bans and anti-drag protests,[33] "don't say gay" laws,[34] attempts to bar trans athletes from sporting competitions,[35] and legal obstacles to changing identity documents.[36] But most notably for this paper, they include efforts to block trans people's access to body modifications known as "gender-affirming care": puberty blockers, hormone therapy, and gender-affirming surgery. Many of the procedures withheld from trans people are considered medical necessities for cis people, including puberty blockers, hormone replacement, reduction mammoplasty, testicular implants, and hair removal.[37]

As of September 5, 2023, the Human Rights Campaign reported that twenty-one of the fifty US states had banned gender-affirming care for people under eighteen, and that these bans directly affect a third of the country's trans youth.[38] Right-wing legislators in the US have expanded their efforts with the intent of banning gender-affirming care for trans adults,[39] and some conservatives openly affirm that their long-term goal is to eliminate all transition-related care.[40] In the UK, after the National Health Service (NHS) announced the closure of its single, overburdened gender care clinic for minors,[41] it released a set of proposed guidelines that would block young people from obtaining puberty blockers and hormones through private insurance, and that advised against social transition (changing names, pronouns, and clothing, without drugs or surgery) except "where the approach is necessary for the alleviation of, or prevention of, clinically significant distress or significant impairment of social functioning."[42] Following a report commissioned in 2020 and published in 2024, which claimed that there was "a lack of high-quality evidence" concerning the efficacy of hormones and puberty blockers,[43] the NHS no longer routinely administers puberty blockers and has promised to take seriously "the risks of enabling a premature social transition."[44]

Barriers to trans healthcare access are often accompanied by rhetoric about the dangers of body modification. Conversion practices, sometimes misleadingly referred to as "conversion therapy," are attempts to brainwash trans people out of their desires for body modification and social transition. Conversion practices persist in many places,[45] despite being psychologically harmful,[46] contrary to the ideals of equality and justice,[47] and widely condemned by professional organizations.[48]

Anti-trans social rhetoric also invokes the paternalistic idea that "we" (a presumed cisgender audience) must protect trans people from the alleged dangers and harms of body modification. The concept of "rapid-onset gender dysphoria" portrays young transmasculine people as naïve adolescent girls seduced by a dangerous fad.[49] This rhetoric draws on ableism, conflating transness with abnormality and ill health and insinuating, on that basis, that trans adolescents are unfit to make decisions for themselves. It also draws on white supremacy and heterosexism, insisting that transmasculine people (overwhelmingly assumed in this rhetoric to be white) should occupy the role of white women and give birth to offspring in nuclear families.

This paternalistic rhetoric also draws heavily on disgust for trans bodies. Consider Abigail Shrier's descriptions of transmasculine people in her book *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*: "surely the girl [sic] on puberty blockers will be acutely aware of her [sic] strangeness";[50] "even with a man's voice, body hair, squarer jaw, and rounder nose, she [sic] doesn't look

exactly like a man";[51] "Less attractive outcomes abound, usually resulting in a saggy boy chest."[52]

Transphobic rhetoric that targets trans women is typically overtly violent rather than paternalistic, treating trans women's bodies as symbolically threatening to the purity of cis women.[53] But it too is laden with bodily disgust, as many authors have noted. For instance, Susan Stryker poetically reclaims transphobic portrayals of trans women as physically monstrous.[54] Julia Serano details how both "deceiver" and "pathetic" archetypes of trans women in the media treat their bodies as objects of disgust and ridicule.[55] Serano cites two popular movies—*The Crying Game* and *Ace Ventura, Pet Detective*—in which a trans woman's genitals are exposed, revealing the "deceit" behind her female features, and cis male observers respond by vomiting in disgust.

Disgust toward modified trans bodies is inherently bound up with societal oppression of trans people. Any adequate ethical theory of trans body modification must take this larger political context into account. And any adequate principle must explain not just why it may be morally permissible for trans people to modify our bodies, but why preventing us from doing so constitutes a serious injustice.

3.2 REPRODUCTIVE ACCESS

Although the Principle of the Unmodified Body does useful work for cis women in many contexts, it is not fully adequate to meet cis women's needs either. It cannot explain the value of access to birth control, including permanent sterilization.[56]

Here, as with gender-affirming care, there is coercive pressure to modify one's body. Around the world, involuntary sterilization is deployed against poor women, disabled women, and women of supposedly "undesirable" races. But equally common—and worrisomely on the rise in the United States—is coercively withholding access to modification, in the form of reduced access to birth control, including emergency contraception.[57] Both coercive pressure to modify and coercive lack of access to modifications are grave injustices because they force people into unwanted physical predicaments against their will. And here, as with trans healthcare, advocating for unmodified bodies falls short of addressing the demands of justice.

Contraception modifies the body and sterilization modifies it permanently. Rationales for blocking contraceptive access vary—obscenity, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech feature heavily—but at least one prominent strand of objections to these interventions focuses on their interference with women's "natural" reproductive capacities. For many women and transmasculine people, an unmodified body is a fertile body—a body that can get pregnant whether or not pregnancy is wanted.

The Principle of the Unmodified Body can explain the wrongness of coercive sterilization, but it cannot explain the wrongness of coercively depriving people of the means to modify their own fertility. Once again, the problem is not to avoid blaming individuals, or leave room for the possibility that body modification is sometimes morally permissible, but to explain why access to these technologies is a matter of justice.

4. THE PRINCIPLE OF THE HOSPITABLE BODY

What links the examples of coercive pressures toward body modification is an insensitivity to the safety and comfort of the person whose body is modified. Hair-straightening and skin-lightening are physically uncomfortable and dangerous; surgeries on intersex children are liable to cause pain and medical complications; the restrictive dieting required for weight loss deprives the subject of pleasure and is burdensome to sustain. While advocates of these body modifications can and often do express the belief that it is "for the subject's own good," the vision of "good" on offer is focused not on what the subject wants or imagines for themself, but on a presumed gaze, typically cis, heterosexual, male, and white.[58]

Chambers, from whom I have drawn the Principle of the Unmodified Body, provides a helpful insight here. She distinguishes an external perspective, which concerns mainly how one's body appears to others, from an internal perspective, which concerns how it feels to inhabit one's body.[59] To view someone else from the external perspective, says Chambers, is to objectify them; to view yourself from the external perspective is to objectify yourself. She urges us to attend to the internal perspective: "[w]hether you feel normal, in the internal sense, has little to do with whether you are normal, in the external sense."[60] This concept of objectification is a better resource than the Principle of the Unmodified Body, as formulated in the quote I draw on, for analyzing the full range of examples at hand.[61]

But the internal perspective should not lead us to endorse the Principle of the Unmodified Body. Instead, we can formulate a better and more general alternative principle, which explicitly centers the perspective of the person whose body might or might not be modified.

> **The Principle of the Hospitable Body**: *you deserve to feel at home in your body*, because your body is *yours*, it is the locus of *your* unique perspective, and *you* have an inalienable value that all others must recognize and respect.

The Principle of the Hospitable Body differs from The Principle of the Unmodified Body in two ways. First, I have replaced the claim that "your body is good enough just as it is" with the claim that "you deserve to feel at home in your body." And second, I have replaced the claim that your body "is you" with the claim that it "is the locus of your unique perspective." I defend each of these changes, and go on to explain why the Principle of the Hospitable Body is more general than the Principle of the Unmodified Body.

4.1 IS YOUR BODY GOOD ENOUGH JUST AS IT IS?

There is an important truth in the vicinity of the claim that "your body is good enough as it is": no one's body needs to be changed just to cater to other people's needs, wants, or aesthetic whims. But sometimes, our bodies are not good enough as they are, in the sense that they are not hospitable places to live.[62] The inhabitant of a body also

has needs, wants, and aesthetic whims, and sometimes these are best served by modifications.

It is uncontroversial that some body modifications are valuable: think of chemotherapy, asthma medications, or treatments for psoriasis. A quick retort on behalf of the opponent of body modifications is that these treatments are exceptions because they are for the sake of health. However, closer scrutiny reveals that appeals to health fail to capture the full range of evaluative considerations at play. People can reasonably reject attempts to cure or treat their health conditions through body modification; consider Harriet McBryde Johnson's refusal to wear an uncomfortable back brace for her scoliosis.[63] And in the other direction, dysphoria and unwanted fertility are both bad for the person who endures them, but describing them as types of ill health is awkward and ill-fitting.

While it is logically possible to shoehorn all of these examples into the mold of health, there is no good reason to insist on doing so. As Elizabeth Barnes points out, health and well-being may be closely intertwined, but they can and often do come apart.[64] What justifies the provision of body modifications is not that they are *health*-improving changes that restore bodily normalcy, but that they are *life*-improving changes that make bodies liveable for their inhabitants.

Gender dysphoria makes one's body less liveable, less like a home. In qualitative studies, participants with gender dysphoria consistently report painful feelings of disconnection and alienation from their bodies.[65] Surgical and hormonal treatments have been reliably shown to improve psychological well-being among trans people.[66] While studies do not typically probe the specific mechanism by which they help, a reasonable explanation is that they relieve dysphoria; studies designed to check this explanation support it.[67]

Here are what some trans study participants had to say about the pain of dysphoria, and about the relief brought by transition:

> I saw that my body would never become as I wanted, at least not by itself. My life, as it was before, was not worth living. I did not live well in any situation.
>
> – an Italian trans woman describing an unwanted endogenous puberty[68]

> It [chest masculinization surgery] was the thing that made it possible for me to get pregnant . . . and I'd never been so depressed in that time that I tried to get pregnant without top surgery. . . . I literally had nightmares of cutting my chest off with scissors.
>
> – Felix, a transmasculine person discussing his experience of pregnancy and lactation[69]

> I feel much more happy and myself when I'm presenting as female than when I'm presenting as male. I've come to realize that the male has been a mask for me for my whole life, and so I'm enjoying removing the mask now and then, and feeling kind of home.
>
> – Nina, a 62-year-old trans woman[70]

We all deserve bodies that we feel connected to, not alienated from. A body that causes its inhabitant intolerable physical or psychological pain is *not* good enough as it is—not when we have readily available technologies to relieve this pain. Sometimes, the best technologies are social: the best way to make fat bodies hospitable is to stop needlessly shaming fat people, and one of the most important ways to make disabled bodies hospitable is to build shared environments that disabled people can freely navigate. But sometimes, the best technologies are medical: topical steroids are valuable tools for calming psoriasis flare-ups, IUDs for controlling unwanted fertility, and hormone therapies for reducing dysphoria.

4.2 IS YOUR BODY YOU?

If you find yourself in circumstances that make it psychologically painful for you to inhabit your own body, you have three basic options: you can change your body, change your psychology, or live with the dissonance as best you can.[71] According to the Principle of the Unmodified Body, changing your body is second best, because it amounts to changing who you are, while changing your psychology amounts to acceptance. But why assume that anatomical traits are more central to the self than psychological, emotional, or behavioral ones?

Consider the following characteristics: *being left-handed*, *being gay*, and *being a communist*. Although these characteristics differ wildly from each other, they have some illuminating commonalities. These are not physical traits in the sense of having obvious anatomical markers;[72] rather, they are psychological traits in the sense of being connected to someone's preferences, beliefs, and self-conception. All three have been targets of coercive pressure to suppress associated behaviors, and perhaps the trait itself: left-handed children forced to write with their right hands; gay people pressured into heteronormative relationship structures; and communists subject to persecution for their political activities. And in all three cases, these coercive pressures are wrong partly because they urge people to suppress, renounce, or abandon important parts of themselves.

Being trans (in the sense of *feeling trans*, rather than in the sense of *having an observably trans body*) belongs with the three examples in the previous paragraphs. It too is a psychological trait, rather than a gross anatomical one. And it too is an important component of the self, such that coercing or pressuring people to abandon it is wrong.

All of this suggests that your body—understood as an assemblage of gross anatomical structures—is not you. There is more to you than your body in this sense; your thoughts, feelings, and self-conception are parts of you

too. Changing these psychological parts of you is not inherently better or more authentic than changing your physical parts, and trying to coercively change someone's mind can be as cruel and damaging as trying to coercively change their body.

At this point, an opponent of body modification might object that all I have established is the moral parity of two of the three possible responses to dissonance (changing your body, and changing your mind). Why not claim that the remaining option is best? That is, why not think that the best response is to keep all the parts of you intact, and live with the pain and dissonance of mismatch?

This is tempting, but wrong, because keeping all the parts of yourself intact is not necessary for keeping yourself intact. You are constantly undergoing physical change: you lose or gain weight, get sick, get injured, recover, learn, change your priorities, remember, forget, and inevitably age. While it is wrong to coerce the left-hander, the gay person, or the communist, these people can spontaneously change without any loss of integrity: learning ambidextrous skills, discovering that one's sexuality is more fluid than he supposed, or changing one's mind about politics. Some of these changes may be welcome, and others less so, but the mere fact that they are changes does not, by itself, make them threats.

While the loss or gain of parts is not a threat to survival, it can be harmful or beneficial to the surviving person, depending on how the parts are lost or gained. Change that is beneficial, and happens in response to an individual's autonomous choice, is a good thing, while change that is harmful, and happens in response to outside pressure, is not. Thus, the social pressures that motivated the Principle of the Unmodified Body are bad not because they motivate change, but because they are insensitive to the wants, needs, and emotional well-being of those they affect most directly. They prioritize having a body that caters to the comfort and aesthetic pleasure of others over having a body that is comfortable from within.

4.3 GREATER GENERALITY

The Principle of the Hospitable Body is more general than the Principle of the Unmodified Body. In cases where the Principle of the Unmodified Body performs well, so does the Principle of the Hospitable Body. In cases where the Principle of the Unmodified Body performs poorly, the Principle of the Hospitable Body does better.

Sometimes, an unmodified body is the most hospitable place to live. In these cases, your body is good enough just as it is, and the Principle of the Unmodified Body falls out as a special case. The examples that motivate the Principle of the Unmodified Body involve people (typically cis women) facing societal pressure to engage in practices that, by their own lights, are at odds with their feelings of comfort and safety: hair straightening, makeup, cosmetic surgery. These modifications "normalize" the person being modified for the comfort and pleasure of outside observers. And in these cases, the Principle of the Hospitable Body agrees with the Principle of the Unmodified Body. The external perspective, which fixates on pleasing a white heterosexual male gaze, advocates body modification; the internal perspective, which advocates for the comfort and pleasure of the body's inhabitants, pushes against it.

But sometimes, the white heterosexual male gaze is best pleased by things as they are, while the body's inhabitant wants something different. We have seen this in the case of trans body modifications and birth control, where normalization often means *blocking* access to modification. There are also presumably cases of non-conflict, where the norms advise people to do what is best by their own lights: seeking chemotherapy in response to cancer, or foregoing tattoos they do not want. I focus here on cases of conflict, since those are the cases where some sort of critique is needed.

Returning to the original examples that motivated the Principle of the Unmodified Body, we discover that in some respects, the Principle of the Hospitable Body provides a more complete account even of them. It is right to decry racist beauty standards that demand that Black women straighten their hair using chemical relaxers. But Longoria points to cases of Black women being singled out for discipline or dismissal at work for wearing blonde highlights.[73] The Principle of the Hospitable Body encourages us to decry both types of pressure as forms of injustice, since both endanger Black women's freedom to inhabit their bodies safely and comfortably. The pressures on our bodies are frequently equivocal, pushing in multiple contradictory directions, so that it is not so easy to tell whether a given modification is "conforming to" or "rebelling against" social norms.[74]

The Principle of the Hospitable Body helps us name what is wrong with pressures toward body modification, but it does not stop there. It helps us name the cisnormative and objectifying demand that trans people remain indistinguishable from cis people of their assigned genders, the misogynistic demand that cis women remain in a "natural" state of fertility, and the femmephobic demand that women not adorn themselves in ways that appear too "unnaturally" feminine.

5. MODIFYING THE QUESTION

Social coercion—whether it pushes us to modify our bodies or to neglect them—can be insidious, and can push in multiple contradictory directions at once. How can we differentiate between a social problem and a reasonable response to the dissonance between body and mind? I think that we can make progress by focusing on the right questions.

Attempts to diagnose the cause of the dissonance are not always helpful. Even if the causes of dysphoria are partly social, knowing this tells us nothing about whether a given body modification is "good" or "bad," appropriately read as "conforming" or "rebellious."[75] Consider an analogy: adverse health effects like diabetes are caused partly by living in a racist society;[76] it does not follow that taking insulin is a way of capitulating to racist pressures or that health insurance should not cover insulin.

Instead, it is helpful to focus on what we can do about the dissonance, given that it exists. Are there social changes that can address the problem without forcing people to make costly changes? In the examples that motivated the Principle of the Unmodified Body, the answer is typically yes: workplaces can stop punishing Black women for wearing natural hairstyles, doctors can stop encouraging parents to cut their infants' genitals, and everyone can dial down their fat-shaming.[77] In the additional examples that support the Principle of the Hospitable Body, the answer is also yes: we can make gender-affirming care and birth control widely available, pass laws against discrimination based on gender modality or pregnancy status, create media depictions of a wide range of trans people, design public spaces in trans-inclusive ways, and offer social supports that make childcare less burdensome.

It is also helpful to consider social changes that would prevent dissonance between our bodies and our minds in the future, while weighing their costs and benefits. Eliminating narrow and cissexist ideas about gender and bodies would benefit everyone, cis and trans alike. Providing better social support for birthing parents would benefit many people besides parents, including children. Such interventions would be unlikely to eliminate all demand for gender-affirming care, or for birth control, but *preventing body modification* makes little sense as a success condition anyway. A better goal is *making room for a variety of bodies to thrive*.

When contemplating these wider changes to society, it might be tempting to judge particular body modifications by asking, "Would anyone still want that in a world without misogyny, heterosexism, and transphobia?" But that, once again, is the wrong question. The answer is unknowable, because none of us has ever seen a society free of misogyny, heterosexism, and transphobia. But for many forms of gender-affirming care, sexist and heterosexist pressures close in from multiple directions so that there is no safe place to stand. This makes it much harder to know what would happen if the pressures were removed.

Even if we knew that no one would want an intervention in a just world, this would not settle what to do in the here-and-now. As critics of ideal theory point out, what happens in the imaginary societies of the future is often a poor guide to what should happen in the here-and-now to bring us closer to justice.[78] Francesca Cesarano, drawing on Serene Khader's work, points out that even if women pursue body modifications in order to comply with unjust and sexist pressures, we do further harm by restricting access to those modifications.[79] Removing options pushes the costs of social change onto the most vulnerable among us, and there are better ways of pushing back against oppressive norms: we can reduce the cost of noncompliance, or push back against the social norms that make the modifications necessary in the first place.

6. CONCLUSION

Some oppressive social norms urge us to seek body modifications that make our bodies more painful, inconvenient, and alienating places to live. Others urge us to neglect our bodies, depriving us of wanted changes that would make our lives more liveable. When it comes to these latter social norms, turning a critical eye toward body modification misses the point. What we need instead is a society that accommodates a greater range of bodies—modified or unmodified—so that everyone has a hospitable place to live.

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NOTES

1. Thompson, "Black Women, Beauty, and Hair as a Matter of Being."
2. Sommerlad, "Skin Lightening."
3. Menon, "Reconstructing Race and Gender in American Cosmetic Surgery."
4. Bauer et al., "Intersex Human Rights."
5. Svoboda, "Promoting Genital Autonomy by Exploring Commonalities between Male, Female, Intersex, and Cosmetic Female Genital Cutting."
6. Wang, "Weight Discrimination."
7. Paine, "'Fat Broken Arm Syndrome.'"
8. Reiheld, "Microaggressions as Disciplinary Technique for Fat and Potentially Fat Bodies."
9. Chambers, *Intact*, 11.
10. Chambers, *Intact*, 76–83.
11. Chambers, *Intact*, 180–83, 304–05, 307–08, and 312.
12. Chambers, *Intact*, 223–32.
13. Chambers, *Intact*, 70–75 and 89–90.
14. Chambers, *Intact*, 8.
15. Chambers, *Intact*, 153–54.
16. Chambers, *Intact*, 285.
17. Bornstein, Gender Outlaw; Califa, *Sex Changes*; Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back"; Spade, "Resisting Medicine/Remodeling Gender"; Missé, *The Myth of the Wrong Body*.
18. Chambers, *Intact*, 277.
19. Chambers, *Intact*, 278–79.
20. MacDonald et al., "Transmasculine Individuals' Experiences with Lactation, Chestfeeding, and Gender Identity," 5.
21. MacDonald et al., "Transmasculine Individuals' Experiences with Lactation, Chestfeeding, and Gender Identity," 5.
22. See Burns, "The Battle over Luna Younger, a 7-Year-Old Trans Girl in Texas, Explained."
23. Chambers, *Intact*, 316.
24. Regarding the principle of autonomy, adolescents are capable of autonomous control over their own bodies and many of their own decisions. Re: the principle of the open future, the only truly reversible approach is to put everybody on puberty blockers (see George and Wenner, "Puberty-Blocking Treatment and the Rights of Bad Candidates"). Regarding the principle that says we should choose children's best interests, the fact that there is disagreement about Luna's best interests does not show that all parties are reasonable, or that such disagreement is impossible to resolve.
25. Luna is unique among the children discussed in the chapter in her ability to form and express opinions. All of the others are infants at the time of the proposed modification, except for one whose severe cognitive impairments prevent her from forming and communicating opinions about what type of body she wants.

26. Maier, "Altering Gender Markers on Government Identity Documents."
27. Yurcaba, "USA Boxing Updates Rulebook to Include Strict Transgender Athlete Policy."
28. Missé, *The Myth of the Wrong Body*.
29. Hawkinson, "Michael Knowles Says Transgenderism Must Be 'Eradicated' at CPAC."
30. McLean, "The Growth of the Anti-Transgender Movement in the United Kingdom."
31. Council of Europe Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, "Combating Rising Hate against LGBTI People in Europe"; United Nations, "United Nations Independent Expert on Protection against Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity."
32. Murib, "Administering Biology."
33. Squirrell and Davey, "A Year of Hate."
34. Rosky, "Don't Say Gay."
35. Barry-Hinton, "Transgender Athlete Ban and the Anatomy of Anti-Transgender Politics."
36. Hines, "Recognising Diversity?"; Parker, "Changes to Gender Recognition Laws Ruled Out"; Brooks, "UK Review of Gender Recognition List Risks 'Trans Travel Ban.'"; Ibrahim et al., "Gender/Sex Markers, Bio/Logics, and U.S. Identity Documents."
37. Schall and Moses, "Gender-Affirming Care for Cisgender People."
38. Human Rights Campaign, "Attacks on Gender Affirming Care by State Map."
39. Javaid, "New State Bills Restrict Transgender Health Care—for Adults."
40. Astor, "G.O.P. State Lawmakers Push a Growing Wave of Anti-Transgender Bills."
41. Andersson and Rhoden-Paul, "APA Resolution on Gender Identity Change Efforts." The NHS has announced the opening of two new regional centers as of April 2, 2024 (NHS Foundation Trust, "New Specialist Gender Service Starts").
42. Rigby, "NHS Drafts Stricter Oversight of Trans Youth Care"; NHS, "Interim Service Specification for Specialist Gender Dysphoria Services for Children and Young People." Note that it is common and unremarkable for cis adolescents to adopt new nicknames and modes of dress even when doing so is not necessary for the alleviation of, or prevention of, clinically significant impairment of social functioning.
43. Cass, "Independent Review of Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People."
44. NHS England, "Implementing Advice from the Cass Review."
45. Rivera and Pardo, "Gender Identity Change Efforts."
46. Campbell and Rodgers, "Conversion Therapy, Suicidality, and Running Away"; Tillewein and Kruse-Diehr, "The Impact of Sexual Orientation Conversion Therapies on Transgender Individuals"; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Ending Conversion Therapy."
47. Ashley, "Transporting the Burden of Justification."
48. See, for example, American Psychological Association, "APA Resolution on Gender Identity Change Efforts," American Medical Association, "Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Change Efforts (So-Called 'Conversion Therapy')," and American Bar Association, "Resolution 112." Some criticisms focus on the ineffectiveness of conversion practices. While it is true that we have little evidence of their efficacy, it is beside the point; even if it were possible to brainwash people into being cisgender and heterosexual, it would be wrong.
49. Hsu, "Irreducible Damage"; Randall "Irreversible Damage."
50. Shrier, *Irreversible Damage*, 165.
51. Shrier, *Irreversible Damage*, 171.
52. Shrier, *Irreversible Damage*, 175.
53. Bettcher, "Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers"; Lenning et al., "The Trifecta of Violence"; Brightman et al., "Anti-Transgender Ideology, Laws, and Homicide."
54. Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix."
55. Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 36–40.
56. Reproductive health is, of course, not exclusively a cis women's issue. Transmasculine people are subject to the same types of reproductive coercion as cis women. Cis men may be denied vasectomies, and people of a variety of gender modalities may be forcibly sterilized. I focus my discussion here on cis women to illustrate how my intervention, though motivated from a trans standpoint, can provide insight about the very group that the Principle of the Unmodified body is meant to help. But nothing I say is intended to downplay the importance of reproductive freedom for these other groups.
57. Much of the anti-reproductive-freedom movement focuses specifically on abortion, which is less closely analogous to trans body modifications, since the interests of the fetus are at issue in abortion debates. The importance of bodily integrity and autonomy also figures heavily in these debates (see Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"). While there are important political connections between anti-trans movements and anti-abortion movements, the philosophical parallels with trans healthcare are more significant for contraceptive access than for abortion access. So my discussion here focuses on contraception (including sterilization), while setting abortion aside.
58. See, for example, Clune-Taylor, "Securing Cisgendered Futures," and Jordan, "Fitness, Fatness, and Aesthetic Judgments of the Female Body."
59. Chambers, *Intact*, 235–38.
60. Chambers, *Intact*, 237.
61. The concept of objectification has many other strands, helpfully pulled apart by Nussbaum in her famous 1995 article. Focus on the external perspective captures the idea of *instrumentality*, the first of Nussbaum's seven strands, in which "The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her own purposes"—in the case at hand, the objectifiers aesthetic and symbolic purposes are particularly relevant—and *denial of subjectivity*, the last of Nussbaum's seven strands in which "The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account" (Nussbaum, "Objectification," 257).
62. We should not always equate the unmodified body with the status quo; many of us already live in modified bodies. My body is surgically and hormonally modified; if it is good enough as it is, then The Principle of the Unmodified Body says that there is no reason to lament my past surgeries or change my stable hormonal regimen. But an adequate principle needs to do more than explain why we no one should coercively *unmodify* trans people who have had the good fortune to access medical interventions already; it needs to explain why it is unjust to continue withholding medical interventions from those who have not yet been able to access them.
63. "When, in childhood, my muscles got too weak to hold up my spine, I tried a brace for a while, but fortunately a skittish anesthesiologist said no to fusion, plates and pins—all the apparatus that might have kept me straight. At 15, I threw away the back brace and let my spine reshape itself into a deep twisty S-curve" (Johnson, "Unspeakable Conversations").
64. Barnes, *Health Problems*, Chapter 2.
65. Graziano, "Meta-Ethnography on Chest Dysphoria and Liberating Solutions for Transmasculine Individuals"; Cooper et al., "The Phenomenology of Gender Dysphoria in Adults."
66. Carroll, "Outcomes of Treatment for Gender Dysphoria"; Wylie et al., "Gender Dysphoria."
67. Ruppin and Pfäfflin, "Long-Term Follow-Up of Adults with Gender Identity Disorder"; Costa and Colizzi, "The Effect of Cross-Sex Hormonal Treatment on Gender Dysphoria Individual's Mental Health"; Park et al., "Long-Term Outcomes After Gender-Affirming Surgery"; van Leerdam et al., "The Effect of Gender-Affirming Hormones on Gender Dysphoria, Quality of Life, and Psychological Functioning in Transgender Individuals." The question of

whether trans body modifications provide relief from feelings of dissociation and bodily distress is different from the question of whether patients regret these modifications. Rates of regret for gender-affirming surgeries are extremely low; a meta-analysis by Bustos et al. ("Regret After Gender-Affirming Surgery"), which considered mastectomy, phalloplasty, hysterectomy, gonadectomy, and a few less common surgeries, estimates the regret rate at 1 percent or less, for both transmasculine and transfeminine patients. (For an instructive comparison, consider the regret rate of knee replacement surgery, which studies have found to be between 6 percent and 30 percent (Madhi et al., "Patients' Experiences of Discontentment One Year after Total Knee Arthroplasty").)

68. Giovanardi et al., "Transition Memories."
69. MacDonald et al., "Transmasculine Individuals' Experiences with Lactation, Chestfeeding, and Gender Identity."
70. Budge et al., "Transgender Emotional and Coping Processes."
71. One can, of course, also challenge the social expectations that led to their feelings of alienation in the first place. But this is not an alternative to the above options; it's compatible with each of them (since endorsing norms is only one part of one's complex psychological being). It's not an answer to the same question; while one is critiquing the norms that led to one's predicament, one must do something with one's body and the parts of one's psychology that clash with it, whether that something is changing them, or leaving them the same.
72. If physicalism is true, then they are all physical traits in *some* sense, but not the sense at issue (see Stoljar, "Physicalism").
73. DeLongoria, "Misogynoir."
74. Sullivan, "Transmogrification."
75. See Sullivan, "Transmogrification."
76. Hill-Briggs and Fitzpatrick, "Overview of Social Determinants of Health in the Development of Diabetes."
77. The social model of disability provides excellent case studies for accomplishing this goal. Instead of treating disabled bodies as inherently limiting, its advocates argue, we can and should design environments that accommodate a wider range of bodies: buildings accessible by ramps and not only by stairs, flexible work schedules, and widely available assistive equipment (Shakespeare, "The Social Model of Disability"). The distinction between the social condition of disability and the physical condition of impairment remains vexed, but the social model's insights about better environmental design don't seem to require any specific stance on this distinction.
78. Sen, "What Do We Want from a Theory of Justice?"; Sen, *What Do We Want from a Theory of Justice?*
79. Cesarano, "Beyond Choice." See also Khader, *Adaptive Preferences*, and Khader, *Decolonizing Universalism*.

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Becoming Unrecognizable: A Deleuzian Reading of Non-Binary Gender Expressions

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Challenging the assumption that sex and gender exist in the form of a binary—or even of any number of fixed and stable categories—is an essential feature of trans philosophy and trans embodiment. In *Trans Liberation*, Leslie Feinberg insists that "the infinite, ever-changing way people express themselves cannot be partitioned into narrow categories."[1] Through her approach to her own identity and to trans liberation, Feinberg asserts that gender expression is ultimately not reducible to a set number of categories; analogous to poetry, gender always transcends existing categorization, which can never fully reflect the variety and particularity of individual expression.

Reading *Trans Liberation* twenty-six years after its publication highlights this dynamic nature of the field of gender expression. While some of the identity categories in use in 1998 have declined, others have emerged. More recently, the term "non-binary" has gained popularity as a form of self-identification, especially among LGBTQ+ youth.[2] This new term raises a particular set of questions and concerns for philosophers of gender. On one hand, its referent appears to include all human beings; insofar as the binarity of gender is a fiction enforced by a heteronormative patriarchal culture, one is tempted to remark that "we are all non-binary" (to paraphrase the title of Kadji Amin's article on the topic). On the other hand, as Amin points out, the term can also, somewhat paradoxically, be criticized for shoring up the binarity of gender. According to this analysis, the term "non-binary" reflects binary thinking in its very attempt to oppose the binarity of gender, with binary and non-binary subjects becoming a new implicit binary.[3] In other words, the term "non-binary" can appear to rely on a new gender binary to make its claim, thus inadvertently reinforcing the structure it seeks to undermine. Things are further complicated by the fact that proponents of the term "non-binary" do not offer a single, clear definition of it, nor do they claim that the term designates a clearly recognizable group of people. Indeed, it is generally accepted that one does not have to present in any particular way to identify as non-binary. This may lead one to conclude, as Amin does, that the term has "no positive social content"; it does not really apply to anyone nor does it describe a lived experience of gender.[4]

In order to clear up some of the confusion around the term, it is helpful to first recognize that "non-binary" is currently used in several ways. In its broadest sense, it indeed seems to constitute a kind of "catch-all" category; for instance, the 2023 Trevor Project report uses "transgender and non-binary" as an umbrella term to include all "non-cisgender" young people.[5] Someone who, like Amin, argues that no subject is in fact unambiguously cisgendered, or, like Feinberg, that gender expression always transcends the binary, can thus correctly argue that "we are all non-binary" in this first sense of the word. But "non-binary" does not only function as an umbrella term or as a way of naming the intrinsic irreducibility of gender to binary categories. It also constitutes a new way of self-identifying and of living one's gender. For certain subjects, being non-binary plays a central role in personal *and* social identity.[6] The fact is that people who primarily identify as non-binary are engaged in a social negotiation of gender, as exemplified by their demand that others use they/them pronouns to refer to them. Furthermore, as the death of Nex Benedict has made painfully clear, adopting a non-binary gender expression does make one more vulnerable to discrimination and violence. Although it is neither possible nor useful to pin down non-binary gender, psychiatrist Guy Millon usefully describes it as "the variety of different ways in which a protest against the gender binary is registered, often through presenting in a way that challenges the idea that

the discrete categories of woman and man are in any way natural or fixed."[7] Thus we can provisionally conclude that, in addition to designating a characteristic of gender in general, non-binary is also a particular form of gender expression embraced by certain subjects who generally choose to use they/them pronouns and to present in ways that do not conform to normative masculinity or femininity.

This article will focus in particular on this latter sense of the term "non-binary," while also keeping as an open question the extent to which "non-binary" characterizes gender in general for all subjects. I propose that by borrowing from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari the concepts of the "molar," the "molecular," and "becoming," we can reach a better understanding of non-binary identity and of the particular way in which non-binary subjects relate to gender categories. Indeed, many of the difficulties raised by the term "non-binary" that I have just laid out stem from an inadequate conceptual approach centered on recognition that prevents us from understanding what is at stake in this form of gender expression. In my view, the term "non-binary" does not simply constitute a new gender category (i.e., a "third" gender) for those subjects who embrace it; rather, it is meant to function as a non-category, or the refusal of gender categories. Deleuze and Guattari's approach allows us to give a more powerful account of non-binary gender expressions as a *refusal of recognition* and as an attempt to bring to the surface the multiplicity and becoming that the illusion of stable identities typically hides from our view.

My argument proceeds by contrasting two conceptual approaches to identity and desire: the first centers recognition and social existence, while the second attempts to foreground multiplicity and becoming through the rejection of recognition and of categorial social existence. I begin by discussing Judith Butler's theory of performative identity in their early work on gender as an example of the dominant understanding of identity through social recognition. I argue that while Butler's work is helpful to understand gender performance in general as the production of identity and rightfully emphasizes the importance of recognition for survival and politics, its focus on recognition ultimately undermines the very challenge to gender norms that is at the heart of non-binary gender expressions. I then present an alternative understanding of identity and desire through Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's work on becoming. In dialogue with Deleuze and Guattari, I offer an interpretation of non-binary experiences of gender as the effort to *become unrecognizable* and consider what is at stake for all subjects in this (non-) performance of identity.

1. DESIRE AND RECOGNITION

Since the 1990s, two frameworks for thinking identity and desire have tensely coexisted in feminist philosophy and informed work in queer theory, critical race theory, philosophy of disability, and, of course, trans philosophy. In "I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess," Jasbir Puar describes this tension as "a dialogue between theories that deploy the subject as a primary analytic frame, and those that highlight the forces that make subject formation tenuous, if not impossible or even undesirable."[8] Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory and Judith Butler's account of performative identity are examples of theoretical approaches that center the subject in order to give complex, nuanced accounts of identity constitution. By contrast, theorists who draw from Deleuze and Guattari's work, such as Donna Haraway, Elizabeth Grosz, Jasbir Puar, and other new materialist thinkers, question the usefulness of the category of the subject and tend to foreground the flow of becoming and notions of assemblage over the stability of identity. These are different but not ultimately incompatible accounts: each framework is useful and, to an extent, complimentary to the other. Or as Puar puts it, "they need not be oppositional, but rather . . . frictional."[9]

Awareness of this philosophical tension is necessary for understanding what is at stake with non-binary gender and the kind of criticisms it has elicited. Indeed, I argue that as a way of doing (or not doing) one's gender, non-binary is much more aligned with the second framework and is more easily understood in its terms.[10] In order to understand this, let us first consider the role of desire and recognition in Judith Butler's account of performative identity.[11]

Judith Butler's early conception of *performative* and *citational* identity is a dominant way of comprehending gender.[12] Butler approaches the question of gender identity through a nuanced view of subjectivity and the social norms that condition it. By affirming the performative nature of identity, Butler highlights that gender is not a fixed characteristic with which one is endowed once and for all. Rather, it is an effect continuously produced through the performance of acts within sets of norms that allow for one's recognition as a subject. I constitute my gender in relation to others by continuously performing actions (e.g., speaking, walking, dressing, etc.) that cite shared norms of masculinity and femininity and are therefore recognizable as *my* masculinity or femininity. Consequently, one's gender is never a purely original, individual creation. Rather, it constitutes an ongoing, dialectical appropriation of norms; a constant negotiation between a subject's desire to be recognized and exist socially and the norms that determine and structure possibilities of recognition in a given social context. So while subjects individually "do" their gender, this doing is structured and heavily regulated by norms that determine intelligibility and recognition.[13] Butler understands transgender people as subjects whose recognition is uncertain because their bodies and subjectivity do not fall neatly within those sets of norms. Interestingly, they point out that trans subjectivity can act as a challenge to the norms in place and has the potential of transforming and expanding these norms. Butler reads transgender subjects' demand to be recognized as a man or as a woman as a demand to imagine a world where he or she could exist, where his or her reality would be possible. Understood in this way, a transgender subject's demand to exist socially is in itself a deeply ethical and political act: it is a call to transform norms and to imagine another possible world where more modes of life could exist.[14]

By understanding identity as a performative effect, Butler denaturalizes gender in a way that undermines any form of essentialism. Gender is not the expression of an inner identity but the ongoing production of that identity. But

while they recognize the fictional nature of any identity, Butler also posits the necessity for any subject to produce *some form of identity* in order to exist as a subject. Indeed, drawing on Spinoza's concept of *conatus*, Butler understands desire fundamentally as the desire to exist and to persist in one's existence.[15] Furthermore, as a Hegelian, they tend to consider recognition to be the essential condition of (social) existence, so that "the desire to persist in one's own being depends on norms of recognition."[16] Consequently, to desire existence is to desire some form of socially recognizable identity.[17] Thus desire aims in some sense at socially recognized and recognizable categories of identity for Butler, even though that identity is nothing but a performative production. One could say that the desire to exist is precisely what motivates the performance of identity.

This conception helps to clarify transgender experience insofar as it is characterized by the longing for social recognition as a man or as a woman. But it is much less useful in explaining efforts to challenge the gender binary or even to affirm a non-gender through one's self-presentation. If some transgender subjects can be understood as making a subversive or transformative appeal to the norm of binary gender, many non-binary subjects are arguably engaged in a different process. They do not seek recognition; rather, insofar as they perform gender in a deliberately ambiguous manner, they are striving to become *unrecognizable* as either *man* or *woman*. Reading these gender performances as subversive reinscriptions of the norm may not be incorrect, but it risks obscuring their radical intent. In its most radical sense, non-binary gender expression is not a subversive appeal to the norm of gender, but rather an escape from and a rejection of that norm. Paul B. Preciado expresses such a rejection in his memoir *Testo Junkie*, where he chronicles his experimentation with testosterone and "gender hacking": "I do not want the female gender that has been assigned to me at birth. Neither [*sic*] do I want the male gender that transsexual medicine can furnish and that the state will award me if I behave in the right way. *I don't want any of it.*"[18]

Preciado's experimentation with the limits of binary gender may be radical and quite philosophically informed, but he is far from alone in expressing such feelings. Many people who identify as non-binary are centrally preoccupied with escaping an identity which was assigned to them at birth, without necessarily seeking to affirm any alternative identity. Describing one of his patients, psychiatrist Guy Millon writes: "Robin identifies as non-binary, saying that their gender identity is constituted by the wish to get away from masculinity rather than any particular affinity with femininity as such."[19] Musing on the meaning of non-binary gender expressions, Millon suggests that it must be understood as a burning desire for escape from gender identities altogether: "What are these non-binary transitions if not attempts to get away-from-here, to move beyond any 'here' which would constitute a place of gender?"[20] While it is highly useful to account for the production of identity in general, Butler's conceptualization of subjectivity in terms of recognition may thus be ill-suited to non-binary gender expressions. Indeed, as Hannah Stark remarks, such a model fundamentally assumes the desire for recognition. Undeniably, subjects always desire, and even need, some measure of recognition. Yet it is also problematic to frame all desire as desire for recognition. In the case of non-binary subjects, one must acknowledge just the opposite: a desire *not to be* recognized.

2. DESIRE AND ESCAPE

Understanding non-binary gender expressions requires that we recognize them as efforts to imagine selves and relationships outside of fixed gendered identities. This in turn demands that we conceptualize a form of existence that is not fully contained by discursive and social norms, but that overflows these norms and is able to both invest them and withdraw from them. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's ontology is especially helpful in doing this. In what follows, I will lay out two of the key concepts Deleuze and Guattari use to articulate the role of desire in their ontology: the distinction between the molar and the molecular, and the idea of becoming-minoritarian.

2.1 THE MOLAR AND THE MOLECULAR

Deleuze and Guattari conceive reality as an immanent, dynamic force of becoming. Norms and categories function as so many social structures—or molar aggregates—imposed on this plane of immanence in order to render it intelligible, to "organize and socialize it."[21] Intelligibility depends on this imposition of a "transcendent plane" onto immanent becoming. But in opposition to many poststructuralist thinkers, Deleuze and Guattari do not conclude from this fact the futility of attempting to think the plane of immanence in and for itself. To the contrary, they reject transcendence as the secondary, if not superfluous, term. Transcendent, molar structures depend on the productive energy of immanent, molecular reality and cannot fully erase or contain its endless productive becoming, even as they attempt to fix it into discrete, stable identities. The plane of immanence thus remains accessible and perceptible even through its molar organization.

Transcendence and immanence, i.e., restrictive norms and productive realities, thus correspond to two ontological levels: the molar and the molecular. Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on this distinction in the last chapter of their book *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. In this work, they critique psychoanalysis and its conception of desire as lack by arguing that desire is truly a productive force, a flux that allows for the couplings and uncouplings that configure desiring machines into different assemblages. In contrast with "molar aggregates" which exist only at the macro level of sociality, they use the term "molecular" to refer to the level of reality where desire manifests as productive. In this microphysical realm, organized wholes and personalized entities do not exist. Only flux, fragments, and partial objects are to be found; these form the pieces of machines or bodies as they are connected into different configurations or "desiring machines."

As Deleuze and Guattari explain, envisioning the molecular demands that one shed all of one's assumptions about the structural or personal unities of wholes, be they machines or organic bodies. They develop this idea by drawing on a passage from Samuel Butler's book *Erewhon*, where Butler asks us, first, to imagine the different machines that we

use in daily life as extensions of our bodies, and, second, to imagine the organs that compose our bodies as so many small machines. By changing our perspective in this way, one can start seeing the interaction of mechanical and organic parts for themselves, without subordinating these interactions to the assumed functions of wholes.[22] Matter, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, interacts just in this way, through constant coupling and uncoupling, from the macro-level of bodies and machines down to the microphysical level of particles. But only at this molecular level does the energy that fuels these interactions become perceptible as free, productive desire. At the molar level, on the other hand, desire is channeled and invested into social aggregates. Under the Oedipal/capitalist regime, subjects are constituted as personalized, stable, functional wholes; their productivity is channeled in service of the capitalist order and their desire is recast as lack.

2.2 A MOLECULAR FREEDOM: ESCAPING, BECOMING

Much of what Judith Butler understands to be the inevitable conditions of subjectivity and existence—i.e., the necessity to be recognized by others through shared and sometimes oppressive social norms in order to exist—corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the molar. And it is indeed at the level of the molar that existence as a subject takes place. As I have argued, this does not, however, exhaust the field of reality for these thinkers. Existence and desire also occur outside of these parameters (or more precisely, at a micro-level that both escapes and founds these parameters), albeit on a non-subjective, impersonal mode. Moreover, while Butler sees the transformation of norms at the molar level as the only avenue for social and political change, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the molecular allows for a different way to free desire.

In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari consider two types of delirium, the paranoiac and the schizophrenic, as paradigmatic of two styles and opposite poles of unconscious social investments. This understanding of delirium as divided between paranoid and schizophrenic aspects originates in the case of Judge Schreber, a German judge who famously recorded his own experience of paranoid schizophrenia. This case, discussed by both Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, is foundational for psychoanalysis' understanding of psychosis. But instead of offering their own clinical analysis of Schreber's psychosis, Deleuze and Guattari use it to read delirium as the "general matrix of every unconscious social investment."[23] They characterize paranoiac delirium as the extreme investment of desire into molar structures, while schizophrenic delirium indicates the withdrawal or disinvestment of desire from these structures along "lines of escape" [*lignes de fuite*]. In the schizophrenic process, desire slips through the net of molar aggregates by following the lines of escape that these representations necessarily include insofar as they are always made up of molecular desiring machines:

> It could be said that by contrast the schizo goes in the other direction, that of microphysics, of molecules insofar as they no longer obey the statistical laws: waves and corpuscles, flows and partial objects that are no longer dependent upon the large numbers; infinitesimal lines of escape, instead of the perspectives of the large aggregates.[24]

Importantly, Schreber's case also played a crucial role in psychoanalysis' understanding of individuals' desire to change sex or gender. Schreber's delirium famously involves a fantasy of experiencing sex as a woman, the feeling that he is or must become a woman, and the "resolution" of this delirium in his becoming God's wife.[25] This led many psychoanalysts to draw a close association between transfemininity and psychosis. For instance, Lacan's analysis of Judge Schreber's case in his *Seminar III* suggests that transsexuality constitutes an untenable identification with *jouissance* symptomatic of certain psychoses.[26] Following this lead, other Lacanian psychoanalysts like Catherine Millot and Geneviève Morel have in turn argued that "transsexuals"' desire to be of the other sex is hopeless and that sex change cannot constitute a solution for what is, according to them, an impossible form of identification.[27]

Deleuze and Guattari are in a sense following this tradition of associating schizophrenia and transfemininity when they theorize "becoming-woman" in their following work, *A Thousand Plateaus*. But while psychoanalytical approaches of trans identification through the prism of schizophrenia are pathologizing, presenting Schreber's conviction that he is a woman (and by extension all trans identification, at least for some authors such as Millot and Morel) as the unlivable result of madness, Deleuze and Guattari's aim is very different. Their concern is political rather than clinical insofar as they emphasize the rebellious and subversive potential of schizophrenia. In Deleuze and Guattari's work, delirium is thus given a much more political bent; they interpret it not primarily as a sign of illness or suffering, but as a political refusal (in the case of schizophrenia) or embrace (in the case of paranoia) of social aggregates.

As I have mentioned, the divestment of molar categories exemplified by schizophrenic delirium is also a process of "becoming," of which "becoming-woman" is a central manifestation.[28] In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari further develop their understanding of this movement of deterritorialization through this new concept. Engaging in processes of becoming (which also include becoming-animal, becoming-molecule, etc.) necessarily means embracing a becoming-minoritarian: "all becomings are becoming-minoritarian. . . . There is no subject of a becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of the majority; there is no medium of the becoming except as deterritorialized variable of the minority."[29] Indeed, becoming-minoritarian means moving away from the ultimate molar structure that represents the "majority" or "standard" [*l'étalon*]. This is why, as Deleuze and Guattari explain, there is no "becoming-man": "man is the molar entity par excellence, whereas becomings are molecular."[30] Every becoming is a "becoming-minoritarian" not because a new (minority) identity is thereby reached, but because through becoming one escapes one's assigned dominant identity. Doing this necessarily means shedding the security and privileges that accompany social recognition and

entering a more perilous form of existence. But it is by taking such risks that desire is freed for Deleuze and Guattari. The ultimate becoming is a becoming-imperceptible; desire, returned to its molecular, sub-perceptible form, is able to escape the net of any structure.

This concept of becoming has been criticized by some thinkers like Alice Jardine, who object that such a process presupposes that one already occupy a dominant position or possess a certain power or privilege. As Stark and Laurie note, "becomings appeal most to those restless within an order that has already allocated them a place."[31] These are important criticisms; they point to the fact that theories of identity that center becoming are importantly complemented by theories that center the subject, especially from a political point of view. Butler's account of identity, as well as intersectionality theory, remain important for thinking ethics and politics. And for those whose status as subjects has never felt secure, recognition remains an ideal to fight for and aspire to. At the same time, the concept of becoming helps us account for the way in which dominant subjects may shed their privileges so as to become truly vulnerable to violence; take, for instance, the case of transwomen who no longer share the privilege of masculinity but instead face an existence at least as violent and precarious as that of ciswomen.

As Deleuze and Guattari emphasize, the molar and the molecular are ultimately identical in nature; they are two faces of one coin, the same reality observed at the macroscopic and microscopic level. Thus the schizophrenic process does not ever fully constitute a full escape from social identity or representation. Rather, it is an escape that necessarily follows the lines traced by representation itself.

> What complicates everything is that there is indeed a necessity for desiring-production to be induced from representation, to be discovered through its lines of escape. . . . The desiring machines take form and train their sights along a tangent of deterritorialization that traverses the representative spheres, and that runs along the body without organs.[32]

Thus non-binary subjects who seek to escape the gender that was assigned to them at birth (like Preciado or Millon's patients) can only do so by moving toward the opposite gender pole; distancing oneself from the masculine can only be done by moving toward the feminine and vice versa, following in each case the lines of escape traced by representation.

Moreover, there is no permanent deterritorialization. The desire that is freed along lines of escape must be reinvested in some new way.[33] From deterritorialized desire, new representations, new assemblages will be formed. It is important to note, however, that Deleuze and Guattari do not consider this to diminish in any way the revolutionary potential of the molecular. Thus the fact that non-binary gender expressions necessarily crystallize, at least temporarily, into forms that can be recognized through the norm of masculinity and femininity does not invalidate their claim to non-binarity. If the molar and the molecular constitute two levels of reality, the struggle is to determine which level will subordinate the other. The constant possibility of deterritorialization and reterritorialization is the power of the molecular: it allows one to escape from "subjugated groups" and to attempt to form "subject groups" where molar aggregates will be subordinated to the productive force of desiring machines.[34] Furthermore, freeing desire from its entrapment in molecular aggregates also allows for a new creativity. As Moira Gatens points out, molar structures do not merely organize the plane of immanence, they also restrict its possibilities of configuration: "any plane of organization selects possibles from the plane of immanence and attempts to pass off these possibles as actual, the only possible actual."[35] By contrast, the plane of immanence is in itself a plane of *experimentation*, one where what is possible is not determined in advance but must always be discovered or created.

3. FROM IDENTITY TO BECOMING

The molar and the molecular thus designate two distinct perspectives on one reality, and one is not fully imaginable without the other. If the desiring machines must necessarily come to form molar aggregates and thus enter into representation, their productive desire is also irreducible to that representation. The molecular is always organized into molar aggregates. But conversely, the molar is always made up of a multiplicity, and identity is always also becoming. From this point of view, it is not surprising that two philosophical frameworks coexist to understand and subvert the social categories that constitute identity. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, theorists who focus on the constitution of subject's identity through recognition, as Judith Butler does, are working at the level of the molar, while thinkers who attempt to undermine the category of the subject entirely by focusing instead on becoming are appealing to the molecular level of productive desire. Insofar as the molar and the molecular are co-constitutive and necessarily coexist, both approaches are valid. When it comes to understanding non-binary gender expressions, however, the molecular takes priority.

Indeed, I want to suggest that non-binary gender expressions can be understood as the effort to reverse the subordination of the molecular to the molar by making perceptible the multiplicity and becoming that necessarily undergirds identity.[36] In Butler's Hegelian account of recognition, social norms are given priority; recognition is only possible in relation to existing norms, even if it is by contesting or subverting these norms. Deleuze and Guattari's focus on productive, molecular desire and becoming changes the focus and allows one to see how the reverse is also true. The process of recognition itself requires a productive energy that it does not create but merely aims to regulate; norms and identity categories are but so many attempts to freeze into a stable shape a flow of matter and energy that necessarily exceeds any given form. While a Butlerian reading may show that non-binary gender expressions are still dependent on the gender binary (as they indeed are in their contestation or negation of it), it is just as true, as Millon suggests, that "even the straightest, most seemingly normative of gender identities is formed in relation to a non-binary current" and a "silent current

of sexuality that exceeds and even mocks these symbolic positions and images we hold of ourselves."[37]

Non-binary performances (or non-performances) of gender can be interpreted as so many efforts to change society's perspective, to bring to attention the multiplicity and the incessant becoming beneath and beyond the arbitrariness of social identities. There is "everywhere a microscopic transsexuality, resulting in the woman containing as many men as the man, and the man as many women, all capable of entering—men with women, women with men—into relations of production of desire that overturn the statistical order of the sexes."[38] Non-binary subjects may go out of their way to embody a fluidity and incoherence that defies any stable identity, but in doing so they are merely bringing to attention a common human condition. Indeed, becoming is not only the characteristic of politically radical subjects. Rather, it is part of the living condition, and of being in a world at all. In *The Argonauts*, Maggie Nelson showcases this shared condition by contrasting the transformation of her partner's body under testosterone with the metamorphosis of her own body through pregnancy and childbirth. Reflecting on these experiences, she notes how all lives are characterized by the becoming that is growing up and aging: "on the inside, we were two human animals undergoing transformations beside each other, bearing each other loose witness. In other words, we were aging."[39]

There are, of course, many legitimate concerns around the precariousness of trans and non-binary existence; it is at times vital to be socially and politically recognized. As Butler has argued, falling outside of recognition altogether means risking being relegated to the category of the abject. Does it follow, however, that recognition is what fundamentally makes life bearable? And if it does, is that not also necessarily a form of recognition that must compromise with becoming and change? Nelson suggests that love is in part what allows non-binary subjects to exist and persist without the need to affirm a stable identity. And as Stark and Laurie put it, it seems that "love and attachment enable people undergoing changes to produce a sense of consistency while simultaneously being supported to pursue lines of flight."[40] Love, indeed, appears to be a form of recognition that, in contrast with rigid social norms, does not require a fixed identity. Many people have been able to maintain loving relationships with intimate partners through radical bodily and social transformation, including cases of gender transition, across and in spite of such strict categories as "homosexual" and "heterosexual." This is not as surprising as it may seem; even the most common forms of love routinely negotiate becoming. Loving someone always in some sense involves loving a becoming, rather than a fixed identity. What for instance, could be a more dramatic change than the transformation of a newborn into a child and an adult? And yet parents do not need to know exactly who their child is, or will be, to love them and know that they will keep on loving them. Both desire and love may thus be forces which enable subjects to experiment with new possibilities, and to continue existing where recognition is denied, or, as with non-binary subjects, refused.

4. CONCLUSION

Throughout this essay, I have attempted to show how gender identity may be understood both as a normative and often oppressive set of categories imposed on and shaping desire, and also as a form of creativity fueled by desire itself. Thus a trans thinker and activist like Feinberg, who opposed the stifling, reductive effects of gender norms, also considered gender as an open field of genuine expression and creativity where new forms of life will keep emerging. The term "non-binary" must be understood in the spirit of such creative experimentation. Far from being a misguided reproduction of binary thought or a category empty of positive social content, non-binary gender expressions bring to attention the productivity and becoming that characterize identity through their refusal of existing gender categories. *Becoming unrecognizable* is not simply a symbolic refusal of recognition within the terms dictated by the norm; it is a gesture of affirmation. Non-binary subjects affirm desire as a creative force, one that is never limited to what is already a possible, and recognizable form of existence. This is Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of desire as a force more primary than any norms imposed on it. If, for Butler, refusing the norms that structure recognition is not truly a possibility, Deleuze and Guattari offer a way to think desire as fundamentally free and productive; a force that no set of norms can entirely or permanently fix into one recognizable shape. Insofar as they are also experiments in desire, non-binary gender expressions are not simply the subversion or the refusal of a set of norms. Rather, they are attempts to imagine and embody new ways of being, new possibilities for existence. Such experimentation can only be driven by a desire that is not a lack, not a demand for recognition, but a plenitude and an affirmation of its own existence and which in turn creates more desire as it enters into new configurations and new assemblages.

NOTES

1. Feinberg, *Trans Liberation*, 56.
2. Recent statistics do not seem to be available, but in a 2021 Trevor Project study of 35,000 LGBTQ youth ages 13–24 in the USA, 26 percent identified as non-binary. (The Trevor Project, ''National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2021.")
3. "Just as homosexuality birthed an idealized heterosexuality and transgender birthed an idealized cisgender, nonbinary has birthed an idealized binary identification as its (ironically, binary) opposite" (Amin, "We Are All Nonbinary," 114).
4. Amin, "We Are All Nonbinary," 116.
5. "This report uses 'transgender and nonbinary' as an umbrella term to encompass non-cisgender young people, which includes young people who identify as transgender and nonbinary as well as other labels outside of the cisgender binary, including genderqueer, agender, genderfluid, gender neutral, bigender, androgynous, and gender non-conforming, among others" (The Trevor Project, "2023 U.S. National Survey of the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People," 28).
6. Here I am also opposing Amin's claim that non-binary identification is problematic because it overemphasizes the internal, psychic aspect of identification and lacks social content. I understand the affirmation that no particular self-presentation is required to identify as non-binary as a strategic claim that aims to oppose any form of policing of people's gender rather than a description of reality. The confusion may arise, however, from the fact that (per my analysis) non-binary subjects are *not primarily engaged in asking for social recognition*. Thus the claim that no specific self-presentation characterizes non-binary

embodiment may in fact more properly be understood as the refusal to be constrained by any criteria that would ensure social recognizability.

7. Millon, "Metamorphosis, Refuge, and the Gaze," 363.
8. Puar, "I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess," 49.
9. Puar, "I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess," 50.
10. This said, the term "non-binary" can also function to emphasize intersectionality. Gender is not the only field governed by binary thought; for instance, race and sexuality are also conceived as binaries. Even the distinctions between these different axes of identity and of oppression can be misleadingly binary. As C. Riley Snorton argues in *Black on Both Sides*, the very distinction between gender and race or sexuality and gender tend to hide the way in which gender is involved in race, race in gender, etc. "Non-binary" can concretely function for some subjects as a way to gesture to this entanglement in their self-identification and to bring to the fore the fact that subjects are never as neatly and independently racialized and gendered (for instance) as these categories suggest. What is at stake in embracing the term "non-binary" is thus not the same for all subjects, nor is it limited to "gender" as an isolated category.
11. I chose to focus on Butler's account of identity given its particular importance for philosophy of gender and also because its focus on recognition illuminates an interesting aspect of non-binary experience. As I show, the desire for recognition that powerfully accounts for some aspects of trans experience manifests instead primarily as a desire for non-recognition (or a refusal of recognition) for non-binary subjects.
12. The account of identity I elaborate here is based on Butler's earlier work on gender as developed in *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies that Matter*, and *Undoing Gender*. Butler's thought has been evolving and their recent approach to gender in *Who Is Afraid of Gender?* may be somewhat different from what I explain here. Interestingly, Butler signals in that book that they have adjusted their understanding of gender in part in response to new materialism's critique of their treatment of nature and matter as passive, inert forces.
13. Gender is "a kind of doing … a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 1).
14. In Hannah Stark's words, Butler's ethical project is to "expand those 'grids of intelligibility' which designate the recognizably human" with the goal of rendering more lives livable (Stark, "Judith Butler's Post-Hegelian Ethics and The Problem with Recognition," 94).
15. "It was Spinoza who claimed that every human being seeks to persist in his own being, and he made this principle of self-persistence, the conatus, into the basis of his ethics and, indeed, his politics." Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 31.
16. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 32.
17. Butler does not deny that people can and do exist outside of social recognition, but their point is that such existence is extremely precarious and open to the specter of violence. This is the condition of the "abject," or of social death. The desire to persist in our existence leads us to seek to be recognized, minimally in a way that makes our existence livable.
18. Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 138.
19. Millon, "Metamorphosis, Refuge, and the Gaze," 365.
20. Millon, "Metamorphosis, Refuge, and the Gaze," 367.
21. Gatens, "Feminism as 'Password'," 60.
22. This change in focus from "unity" or the "whole" to the connections between parts, both organic and mechanical, is the idea that Donna Harraway develops so productively with her concept of the cyborg. As she writes: "Cyborgs are not reverent; they do not re-member the cosmos. They are wary of holism but needy for connection" (Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," 4).
23. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 280.
24. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 280.
25. Izcovich, "Identification féminine et pousse-à-la-femme dans la psychose."
26. Lacan, *The Psychoses*. Lacan terms this type of identification in schizophrenia the "push-to-the-woman." Much more could be said on Lacan's approach of transgender identification but that is not my concern here. My aim is simply to contrast Deleuze and Guattari's association of trans identification ("becoming-woman") and schizophrenic delirium with psychoanalysis' understanding of the connection between these two terms. Simply put, the latter is pathologizing while the former is (politically) empowering.
27. "The idea that transsexuality is grounded in the conviction of being a man or a woman is one fallacious certainty that the evidence of transsexuals enables us to dismiss. Another certainty that must also be called into question is the notion that the transsexual malaise can only be remedied through sex-change . . . analysis of dreams of those awaiting surgical transformation reveals that the step they are about to take provokes psychic conflict, and that their sexual identity is far from free of contradictions, as has been claimed." Millot, *Horsexe*, 143.
28. One is tempted to read "becoming-woman" as Deleuze and Guattari's response to Lacan's "push-to-the-woman." In accord with these authors' very different readings of schizophrenic delirium, these concepts manifest opposed movements; while becoming-woman represents a movement of divestment and escape from a social category, "push-to-the-woman" constitutes the point of arrival and resolution of Schreber's delirium in Lacan's analysis. If what is at stake in these concepts is indeed a certain account of trans identification, then they offer very different readings of the movement represented by the prefix "trans". (For some productive musings on the different possible meanings of "trans", see: Stryker, Currah, and Moore, "Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?")
29. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
30. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 292.
31. Stark and Timothy, "Deleuze and Transfeminism," 129.
32. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 315.
33. "How would these decoded and deterritorialized flows of desiring-production keep from being reduced to some representative territoriality, how would they keep from forming for themselves yet another such territory, even if on the body without organs as the indifferent support for a last representation?" (Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 315).
34. For Deleuze and Guattari, we are part of subjugated groups when our desire is subordinated to socially regulated and enforced identities, such as "man" and "woman," "heterosexual" and "homosexual," and even "cisgender" and "transgender."
35. Gatens, "Feminism as 'Password'," 72.
36. While firmly rooted in English grammar, a non-binary subject's preference for the pronouns *they/them* interestingly seems to reflect that multiplicity, the refusal to present as one and self-identical.
37. Millon, "Metamorphosis, Refuge, and the Gaze," 368.
38. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 296.
39. Nelson, *The Argonauts*, 83.
40. Stark and Timothy, "Deleuze and Transfeminism," 134.

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Decolonial Trans Futurity: A Trans of Color Critique of Normative Assimilation

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Anchored in a decolonial framework, we understand race and gender as co-constructions of colonial modernity. Drawing on María Lugones's concept of the colonial/modern gender system, we argue that non-normative racialized trans subjects are pathologized through the imposition of a racial-colonial system of binary gender. We argue that coloniality, when adopted into the medical-psychiatric apparatus, takes shape as *transnormativity*: an individualized, medicalized form of trans identity that is rooted in a white, Western understanding of gender. Building on Jasbir Puar's framework of homonationalism and trans(homo)nationalism, and critiques of assimilationist queer politics through the lens of racial capitalism and anti-imperialism, we argue that trans(homo)nationalism is the absorption of transnormativity into the broader operations of state power, and see transnormativity as an extension of coloniality, operating as neo-colonialism. We argue that the political implications of trans(homo)nationalism include the sanctioning of violence and marginalization of non-normative and racialized trans subjects, and the continued imposition of a regime of racialized normative gendering.

This assimilationist nationalist agenda is funneled through the for-profit medical-psychiatric apparatus wherein transition is co-opted into a curative, progress-based temporality. Looking to theorizations of trans temporality, we critique notions of linearity and futurity insofar as they bolster the deployment of racist, nationalist, and imperialist state agendas. We articulate a vision for futurity grounded in a trans of color framework which resists assimilation into normativized gender, and call for truly radical futures for trans people that resist the medicalized forms of trans identity that subscribe to the colonial, white, Western ideals of gender.

1. COLONIAL PRACTICES AND RACIALIZED GENDER

1.1 THE DECOLONIAL FRAMEWORK

The decolonial framework is chiefly concerned with identifying colonial forces and the continuation of coloniality, which permeates modern society. In this paper, we are most interested in examining how coloniality structures conceptions of identity, personhood, and agency, particularly as it pertains to racialization and gendering. Various academic traditions address racialization from unique perspectives, but the psychoanalytic lens of Martinican scholar Frantz Fanon is foundational for understanding the effects of racialization on a subject's sense-of-self. In his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon argues that colonialism strips a racialized subject's independent identity to construct a "colonized mind," that is, a complete isolation of the subject from their personhood, thereby reconstructing them according to the colonizers' will. Control of the body is relinquished and the flesh itself is rendered a violent caricature, an object subjected to racial domination. The colonized mind, then, does not belong to the subject but rather to the colonizer. Fanon describes the affective response of a racialized subject made viscerally aware of their prescribed condition:

> [T]he corporeal schema crumble[s], its place taken by a racial schema . . . it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but a triple person . . . I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics . . . completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?[1]

The abrasive imagery present in Fanon's writing is reflective of the perpetual violence inflicted by racialization. For Fanon, colonialism did not simply re-work an existing reality but rather introduced a new reality altogether, one defined by the demarcation between white men and racialized Others. This reality is so heavily constituted by histories

of kidnapping, enslavement, objectification, policing, segregation, and further marginalization that the colonized mind is battered into subjugation:

> I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed*. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro![2]

Coloniality infects each of its subjects with white supremacist thought, making synonymous the identity of a racialized subject and their racialization itself. A racialized subject, then, cannot reasonably exist under coloniality without some degree of recognition of their racialization.

Since *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon and other decolonial scholars have expanded the tradition to include critiques of other dominant systems of oppression and control. Anibal Quijano has argued that the Western model of modernity has placed racialized subjects at the center of capitalist constructions of labor,[3] and María Lugones responded to his work with a critique of her own. According to Lugones, the decolonial framework has remained complicit to gendered domination, which she finds to be an underexplored facet of coloniality.[4] Such complicity, she argues, is found in decolonial texts that analyze the "categorical separation of race, gender, class and sexuality,"[5] thereby reducing gender to an oppression inflicted by patriarchal rule independent of racialization. She takes issue with this analysis and introduces the concept of a "colonial/modern gender system" to describe the ways in which coloniality effectively linked race and gender under one cohesive system of domination.[6] As this paper intends to explore her framework in collaboration with trans scholarship, developing a deeper understanding of the colonial/modern gender system is in order.

1.2 COLONIALITY OF GENDER

In "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," Lugones expresses her concern with "how politically minded white theorists have simplified gender in terms of the patriarchy."[7] She writes:

> [t]he heterosexualist patriarchy has been an ahistorical framework of analysis . . . we keep on centering our analysis on the patriarchy . . . without any clear understanding of the mechanisms by which heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classifications are impossible to understand apart from each other.[8]

By naming the colonial/modern gender system, Lugones hopes to "make visible the instrumentality of the colonial/modern gender system in subjecting us—both men and women of color—in all domains of existence."[9] In beginning her analysis, Lugones contests the popular notion (as echoed by Quijano) that sex is strictly biological. She argues that the existence of intersex individuals is evidence of a taxonomical problem which clearly demarcates males and females by phenotypical—and, rarely, hormonal or chromosomal—characteristics, consequently demanding the enforcement of sexual dimorphism through medical intervention. She posits:

> The cosmetic and substantive corrections to biology make very clear that "gender" is antecedent to the "biological" traits and gives them meaning. The naturalizing of sexual differences is another modern use of science that Quijano points out in the case of "race." Not all traditions correct and normalize intersexed people. So, as with other assumptions, it is important to ask how sexual dimorphism served and continues to serve global, Eurocentered, capitalist domination/exploitation.[10]

By dismissing the biological substantiation of a sex binary, Lugones opens the decolonial tradition to an investigation of sex/gender as yet another product of coloniality. "Colonialism," she writes, "did not impose precolonial, European gender arrangements on the colonized. It imposed a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers."[11] That is, colonialism introduced a gender system dependent on the racialization of its subjects, making race-gender a continuous network of colonial legacies.

A history of binary thinking—white and black, male and female, superior and inferior—has dictated the colonial reality in which each system of domination uniquely ties back to the operations of white supremacy. Lugones describes the "encompassing phenomenon"[12] of coloniality as the "global, Eurocentrist, capitalist domination/exploitation"[13] of "all control over sex, subjectivity, authority, and labor"[14] as prescribed by colonial powers. One can view coloniality as an "epistemological project"[15] that recenters "human reality"[16] as a practice based in sexual dimorphism forming a production of labor upheld by "two groups: superior and inferior, rational and irrational, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern."[17] The two groups were notably racialized in that one (superior, rational, civilized, and modern) exclusively described white Europeans[18] and their traditions as the only valid modes of being, effectively naturalizing the remaining populations as inferior, irrational, primitive, and traditional. The naturalization makes non-white populations targets for colonial violence, frames them as responsible for the violence enacted on them, and positions colonizers as the producers of "the most advanced moment in the linear, unidirectional, continuous path of the species."[19]

1.3 NORMATIVIZING GENDER PRACTICES

Non-white, non-Europeans are merely hurdles that the modernization of global life must work to overcome, but Lugones notes that previous attempts to examine colonial racialization fell short when describing gender: sexual dimorphism has been centered in decolonial texts, but only in the sense of its naturalization through the means of labor. Non-normatively sexed—and subsequently gendered—subjects remain shadowed by coloniality's natural modes of being, ultimately regarded as secondary

to the realities established through a colonial lens. In this way, one can think of both race and gender not as "predetermined destinies, nor biological or genetic facts for human beings,"[20] but rather as realities that "come into being"[21] following a legacy of colonial domination. The conflation of race and gender means that both racialized and non-racialized subjects are bound to particular colonial institutions which naturalize gender as an inherent reality. Even "European/white women, while subordinated to the category of 'Man,' [are] still *fundamentally* a part of the project of colonial modernity,"[22] making both racialized and non-racialized subjects bound to Lugones's concept of the colonial/modern gender system. It is necessary to understand the ways in which racialized gender has come to permeate our current reality if we wish to work towards any sort of racial or gendered liberation; Alex Adamson notes that feminism and queer theory "cannot only be about denaturalizing sex, gender, and sexuality; [they] must also make visible the mode of being human in which these categories emerge,"[23] those modes, of course, being distinctly related to racial categories as inscribed by hegemonic structures of colonial whiteness.

Notably, for Lugones, colonized people are not gendered so much as sexed, where "colonized people became males and females. Males became not-human-as-not-men, and colonized females became not-human-as-not-women."[24] The forced assimilation of colonized people into the binary, oppositional, and hierarchical gender system thus marks people of color as "failures juxtaposed to the ideal of *real* women or men . . . [since] gender legitimation was reserved for those who were constructed as 'human' within the colonial order, that is, land-owning, bourgeois white men and women."[25] Lugones's work provides a vital and rich account of the ways in which colonization operates through the imposition of this racialized gender system. However, engaging with her work for a trans of color project necessitates paying attention to the silences, erasures, and absences of transness. Brooklyn Leo's work reveals that Lugones's account of the colonial/modern gender system remains mired in the assumption that "there would not be bodies that failed to meet either sex-gender requirements of male/female within the colonial/modern gender system."[26] Leo points out that for Indigenous Two-Spirit communities, neither "not-human-as-not-men" nor "not-human-as-not-women" captured the mechanism of targeting for violence reserved for Two-Spirit and colonized trans people of color. In fact, Leo argues that this targeted violence is necessary and central to how the colonial/modern gender system is upheld and legitimated. Leo's reframing of the colonial/modern gender system as a colonial/modern *[cis]* gender system shows that central to its maintenance is the "disciplining of gender-nonconforming peoples of color who threaten the factious narrative of gender as static, indexed to one's sex at birth, and dimorphic."[27] A decolonial trans of color framework is thus called for as a method of understanding, grappling with, and ultimately resisting the violent imposition of this [cis]gender system.

In uncovering the racialized history of gender, we can discover the ways in which gendered normativity is directly influenced by colonial notions of race. C. Riley Snorton tells us that Black gender remains separate from white gender in that it "finds expression and continuous circulation within blackness, and blackness is transected by embodied practices that fall under the sign of gender."[28] Snorton's claim of gender as both a cultural and social racial phenomenon is backed up with significant genealogical evidence relating to continuous colonial institutions.[29] Under colonial realities, it is imperative that sexing and gendering remain enfleshed in each other; attempts to "[aestheticise, value, and modify] one's body to become intelligibly sexed and gendered"[30] naturalize a reality in which facets of gender are tied to physical features of a sexed body. "Intersex genital mutilation" and other normalizing practices such as some forms of gender affirming care must be called into question when working to move beyond the colonial/modern gender system and its effects on racialized, sexed, and gendered subjects, as these practices assume an attempt to appeal to normalized bodily comportments and modality.[31]

The method by which the colonial/modern gender system identifies non-normatively gendered subjects and distinguishes them from normatively gendered subjects is *pathologization*: the practice of assigning uniquely medical terminology to an individual on the basis of non-normative behaviors, appearances, or otherwise interpellating factors. The goal of pathologization is often twofold: (a) to isolate a subject from the status of normativity so as to preserve the exclusive nature of the status altogether, and (b) to "cure" a subject of any perceived ailments or faults by urging the subject to abandon non-normative traits or expressions. Dean Spade writes that since "gender nonconformity is established as a basis for illness . . . the description of the 'ill' behavior . . . creates not a prohibitive silence about such behavior but an opportunity for increased surveillance and speculation" of the transsexual subject.[32] Essentially, transsexual and gender nonconforming subjects are assigned a diagnostic label that makes obvious their transsexuality or nonconformity, rendering such subjects vulnerable to discrimination and violence. The need to subdue various gendered subjects—particularly racialized gendered subjects—stems from a colonial history of supremacy and domination. Indeed, pathology and the gendered normativity that it works to buttress are both products of coloniality and worth critiquing.

2. TRANSNORMATIVITY, WHITENESS, AND THE MEDICALIZATION OF TRANS IDENTITY

The colonial co-construction of race and gender enshrines a racialized division of binary gender; while trans people disrupt colonial impositions of a cisgender binary, the colonial pathologization of gender variance results in a drive toward normalization and assimilation. stef shuster explains how the emergence of trans healthcare in the twentieth century came with a "particular concern" expressed by healthcare professionals to normalize "transsexual bodies and experiences."[33] Healthcare workers were only interested in providing care to trans people who were willing to "prove their reliability" as a credible patient who willingly conforms to normative gender expectations.[34] This was to the benefit of the medical community: they could restrict care while upholding themselves "as benevolent and paternalistic for offering aid" at all.[35] The criteria of

patient credibility was structured to be classist and racist, and required that the patients would bolster the integrity of the provider by "being a productive citizen" post-transition.[36] The "regulatory power and surveillance of the medical community" allowed providers to deny care to any patient they deemed to be unable or unwilling to "move undetected through social life."[37]

This pathologized regulatory script forced onto trans people is *transnormativity*: a framework that constructs and maintains the hegemonic narrative of transness all trans people are expected to uphold. This narrative assumes that all trans people conform to the account of being born in the wrong body, that they all want and require medical transition, that they all should and do seek to present and be perceived as cisgender and binary, and that they all experience transness the same way.[38] Thus transnormativity functions as an extension of coloniality, aiming to fit transness into a neat homogenous structure that replicates binary, oppositional gender systems. shuster writes that the normalized narrative of trans experience requires that "beginning in childhood, trans people . . . [must] feel disgust with their bodies, particularly with their genitals, and always want to dress in the clothing and play with the toys of the opposite gender. Any deviations from this narrative was met with suspicion by those in the medical community.[39] As Sandy Stone points out, in transnormative narratives trans people "go from being unambiguous men, albeit unhappy men, to unambiguous women. There is no territory between."[40] However, many trans people exist in this "territory between," and "transnormativity and trans exceptionalism are aspirational fantasies that very, very few trans subjects are able to live out phenomenologically."[41] The ability to embody proximity to what Hil Malatino calls "normative gendered legibility"[42] relies on the medicalized model of transition, which necessitates adherence to normative, binary, racialized gender.

Transnormativity also relies on the constructed binarisms of sex and gender, which work to reinforce each other and derive from the imposition of a colonial gender system. Drawing on Lugones, Adamson claims that "sex is not, and has never been, dimorphic, but rather the hegemonic construction of sex as necessarily dimorphic is a construction of colonial/modernity."[43] Noting the recognition of intersexuality in Indigenous societies prior to colonization without assimilation into a sex binary, Lugones argues that colonial organizations of sex and gender operate to "correct" the sex of intersex people to be in line with gender, and hence that gender is the system which enforces meaning upon biological traits, rather than a system *based* on biological traits.[44] Sexual dimorphism as well as the gender binary are hence brought into question as racialized colonial constructions. The goal of the medicalized model of transition, too, is to bring sex into alignment with gender, undergirded by the assumption that the movement is from one binary pole to another.

The intertwined colonial constructions of race and gender mean that "gender is always racialized and racialization is also always gendered."[45] The medical model requires that trans people adequately perform transness by demonstrating alignment with the binary, heterosexual, and wrong body narratives associated with transnormativity. Such a performance is necessarily racialized, and whiteness is enmeshed in the medicalized model such that "trans persons of colour are expected to uphold ideals of white femininity and masculinity if they wish to gain access to medical services."[46] On top of rendering the navigation of trans healthcare systems additionally challenging for trans people of color, this medicalized white Western model of transition also results in a "hierarchy of gender normativity" that pathologizes not only trans people as a whole but specifically non-normative racialized trans people.[47] The centering of dysphoric distress within the psychiatric-medical apparatus props up another transnormative narrative: that of an atomistic individual who feels they were "born in the wrong body"; but, as Spade points out, such an individualized understanding of transness demonstrates "[a]nother immediate error and danger of the medical model of transsexuality . . . its separation of gender from cultural forces."[48] This masks the role of colonial racialization and the social world of gendered experiences and isolates trans individuals as pathological.

Individual trans people, even when they may not subscribe wholly to transnormative narratives about themselves, need to perform this normativity in order to access gender-affirming care. As Spade writes, "[m]y quest for body alteration had to be legitimized by a medical reference to, and pretended belief in, a binary gender system that I had been working to dismantle since adolescence . . . not only medical treatment, but also legal rights and social services for trans people are dependent upon successful navigation of that medical system."[49] The highly regulated binary gender normativity that institutions demand of trans people in order to access gender-affirming care can be deeply harmful and dehumanizing for those that navigate these structures, and especially so for racialized non-normative trans people. An individualist analysis of transnormativity is thus less useful than a structural examination that focuses on the complicity of the transnormative subject in the broader operations of neoliberal capitalism, imperialism, and racism.

3. COLLUSIONS OF TRANSNORMATIVITY AND HOMONATIONALISM: TRANS(HOMO)-NATIONALISM

3.1 CONSTRUCTING HOMONATIONALISM: HOMONORMATIVITY, RACIAL CAPITALISM, AND IMPERIALISM

In *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Jasbir Puar introduces the concept of homonationalism to argue that state acceptance of normative homosexuality operates as a form of sexual exceptionalism that is "contingent upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary."[50] Puar argues that liberal state acceptance of normative gayness takes place at the expense of sanctioning the exclusion of and violence against non-normative queer and racialized subjects. This absorption of gay subjects into the "national imaginary" develops from what Lisa Duggan refers to as a "new homonormativity" that "does not

challenge heterosexist institutions and values, but rather upholds, sustains, and seeks inclusion within them."[51] Duggan argues that this "new homonormativity" is the manifestation of neoliberal sexual politics, which "upholds and sustains [dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions] while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."[52] Homonormativity adapts gay rights to fit in with dominant heteronormativity, ensconced in the ethos of a racial capitalist logic that reinforces dominant class and race positions while claiming the alterity of sexual identity.

Within the broader scope of liberal gay and lesbian politics, patriarchal, heterosexist, capitalist, and often nationalist and imperialist institutions such as marriage, the family, and the military, become sites of seeking inclusion rather than sites of radical queer protest.[53] As Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore so stringently points out, "Wilful participation in US imperialism is crucial to the larger goal of assimilation, as the holy trinity of marriage, military service and adoption has become the central preoccupation of a gay movement centered more on obtaining straight privilege than challenging power," crucially failing to understand that "assimilation *is* violence" and that "against the nightmare backdrop of assimilation, queers striving to live outside conventional norms become increasingly marginalized."[54]

The assimilationist goals of homonormativity, when absorbed into imperialism and nationalism, mean that homonationalism then "provides an alibi for the necropolitical violence perpetrated on racialized and sexualized others inside and outside of US borders."[55] Challenging the standard notion that "the nation is heteronormative and that the queer is inherently an outlaw to the nation state," Puar argues that, particularly notably in the post-9/11 US context, homonormativity in its collusions with nationalism demonstrate sharply how "the celebration of the queer liberal subject as bearer of privacy rights and economic freedom sanctions a regime of racialized surveillance, detention, and deportation."[56] The liberal discourse of individual rights conceals the selective granting and denying of rights, and assimilation promises tentative protection within the system without challenging any of the foundational inequalities that remain baked in or the simultaneous harm enacted as an extension of the same nationalist imperialist project.[57]

3.2 TRANS(HOMO)NATIONALISM: TRANSNORMATIVITY AS A FUNCTION OF COLONIALITY

For Puar, queer subjects are "normativized *through* their deviance (as it becomes surveilled, managed, studied) rather than despite it."[58] While homonormativity and homonationalism primarily emerge as an analytic for liberal gay and lesbian politics, trans subjects are far from exempt from the same capture. Tracing homonationalism as a development of homonormativity's capture for nationalistic goals can help provide an understanding of the ways in which transnormativity can also be subject to neoliberal assimilation into state aims. Puar extends the framework of homonationalism to argue for the emergence of a trans(homo)nationalism and processes of trans normativization, whereby rights and citizenship are conditional based on assimilation into gender normativity.[59] Assimilation provides for the marginalized a path to acceptance, but the underlying conditions of normativity rely on the simultaneous exclusion of the racialized other.

Trans of color subjects thus emerge as "biopolitical failures" who cannot and do not meet the conditions of normative integration into the national imaginary.[60] Drawing on Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura's work on the "production of transgender whiteness,"[61] Puar extends the argument that trans of color subjects are incorporated into a broader process of value extraction from bodies of color. This makes clear that a liberal rights discourse is incapable of conceiving trans of color liberation and in fact reinforces their oppression, since the "inconceivability is a precondition to the emergence of the rights project, not to mention central to its deployment and successful integration into national legibility."[62] As Jin Haritaworn and C. Riley Snorton point out, the possibility of assimilation is not universally distributed, and transnormative inclusion is only possible when "those whose multiple vulnerabilities lend the moral panic its spectacularly violated bodies are continually reinscribed as degenerate and killable."[63] Transnormativity when channeled through state power (or transnationally through imperialism) appeals to neoliberal rights discourses while simultaneously demarcating trans of color subjects for pathologization and violence. The politics of viewing transnormativity as a function of coloniality allows for trans assimilationism to be understood as furthering the aims of neoliberal, racist, imperial states in Othering, exploiting, and enacting violence against racialized trans subjects.

4. AGAINST TRANS(HOMO)NATIONALISM: TOWARDS A DEMEDICALIZED, DEREGULATED, TRANS FUTURITY

Transnormativity, when channeled through state apparatuses as trans(homo)nationalism, promises acceptance, but only to those willing to capitulate to the "desire to be 'normal.'"[64] However, as Aizura argues, not only is this "normative social sphere" a fantasy, it is one that is "racially and culturally marked as Anglocentric, heteronormative, and capitalist."[65] The appeal of the fantasy goes beyond the desire for normative acceptance. Since the constructors of the fantasy are also those with the power of alternately bestowing and taking away rights, the hope of acceptance also comes with the goals of safety and protection. Trans of color critique and intervention is vital here specifically because of the racialized nature of this neoliberal fantasy peddled and sustained under the guise of acceptance. The politics of transnormativity "secure[s] citizenship for some trans bodies at the expense of others, while replicating many forms of racism, xenophobia, and class privilege."[66]

Separating ourselves from the state apparatus necessarily includes a separation from the medical industrial complex with which it colludes. As we discussed in Section II, there have been many critiques on the pathologization and medicalization of trans identity, often dissenting from the

claim that trans subjects should produce clearly articulated accounts of dysphoria in order to access gender-affirming care. These critiques are valuable and necessary, but we may find that they are perhaps too narrow for the scope that futurity requires. The material issues which trans people face in our current political conditions—those of job and home insecurity, improper designation on legal forms, unfair and dangerous treatment from insurance companies, etc.—certainly need to be addressed, but liberal stances on these issues cannot be our only solution. Even if the federal government mandates that hormone replacement therapy be free to any trans person seeking treatment (which is more of a fantasy than anything else), we are still faced with this issue of pathologization and medicalization; we are still burdened with the knowledge that the state is supporting the endeavor of assimilating the transsexual into normative society. We and many other queer theorists find the issue of assimilation to be very alarming, if only because assimilation seems to be the antithesis to queer politics altogether.[67] The problem remains that we have to find a way to make the world safer for transsexuality without diluting it into a politic of normative legibility. The "slipperiness of gender,"[68] as Spade called it, cannot reasonably be captured by any such politic, as the slipperiness describes an evasion of legibility itself. Given that transition is co-opted into a curative, progress-based temporality that serves the assimilationist nationalist agenda in this manner, we look towards trans theorizations of temporality in order to envision an anti-assimilationist queer trans futurity.

4.1 THEORIZING TRANS TEMPORALITIES, BUILDING TRANS FUTURES

Trans temporalities have been theorized in a number of ways; we examine how notions of linearity and futurity are developed within conceptualizations of trans time in order to articulate how temporalities of transition are involved in the deployment of racist, imperialist goals of trans(homo) nationalist projects, and then aim to articulate a vision for futurity grounded in a trans of color framework.

Laura Horak theorizes "hormone time," as it operates in transition vlogs on YouTube, as evidencing a "progressive temporality"[69] that mirrors heterosexual reproductive time in its linearity but wherein the goal is reappropriated away from reproduction and nation building towards building "expansive trans subjects and communities."[70] However, trans lives are "irreducible to the presupposed chronological progression from a 'terrible-present-in-the-wrong-body' to a 'better-future-in-the-right-body,'"[71] which is the normative narrative of transition. The temporality of transition relies deeply on factors of class, race, ability, citizenship, geography; a homogenous linear progressive narrative hence fails in that it "reifies and perpetuates hegemonic structures of power, producing privileged and subaltern trans subjects."[72] Therefore, recognizing that "the shape of most trans lives doesn't mimic the progressive teleological contours of such narratives," Hil Malatino offers an analysis and critique of Horak's conception of hormone time as a utopian formulation where "the future is always better than the present, a site of promise, deliverance."[73] While Horak's hormone time offers a useful framework for understanding how transition is temporalized within a particular context, it also highlights the operation of transnormativity at the level of temporality, in homogenizing a linear progressivism that functions as an "erasure of the lived temporality of particular trans lives."[74]

For Malatino, hormone time and other such ameliorative futural narratives of medicalized transition are suspect, in that they encourage "trans subjects to cathect hope for a more livable life to a for-profit medical industry that, too often, lacks empathy and sensitivity and treats trans subjects as a niche market rife for economic exploitation" and because "the politics of access to forms of medical transition . . . aren't significantly engaged, and those that experience compromised access are encouraged to understand this as tantamount to a foreclosed future."[75] In our analysis of how transnormativity gets taken up for nationalism and imperialism, these futural narratives additionally can be understood as attached to a nation's image of progressiveness. So trans subjects "cathect hope for a more livable life"[76] also to the promises of nationalist projects that stress the normativity of (implicitly white) trans subjects as a precondition for livability while non-normative and racialized trans subjects are written out of the rights agenda.

Our project seeks to ground itself in an understanding of temporality and futurity that draws from trans of color figurations, such as that of Jian Neo Chen and micha cárdenas, who understand transness as being "not about a crossing from one location to another but about a multidirectional movement in an open field of possibility" and thus as fluid rather than linear or teleological.[77] In fact, the latter conception is seen as evidence of "the dominant culture's diminishing of trans temporalities to the visible and calculable [which] attempts to regulate and assimilate trans experiences into the times and spaces of the state, society, and nation."[78] The racialization embedded within transnormative temporalities can be understood as a form of what Stryker calls "biopolitical racialization" wherein "biopower constitutes transgender as a category that it surveils, splits, and sorts in order to move some trans bodies toward emergent possibilities for transgender normativity and citizenship while consigning others to decreased chances for life."[79] The futural narratives of medicalized transition and its "emergent possibilities" are therefore ensconced both in the medical industry and the national imaginary. A trans of color figuration aims to resist the imperatives of normative gendering, requiring "the decolonial acknowledgment of the injustice of the present, which sees that present as emerging from a past colonial encounter and works for futures that will exist after racial capitalism's totalizing logics."[80]

In thinking with decolonial trans of color theorizations of temporality, one can develop a notion of futurity that does not capitulate to neoliberal co-optations. Brooklyn Leo's theorization of a "spiraling time of cocooning" shows how one can think of trans identity and transition beyond the individual and the linear:

> Tarrying inside this wound, I am faced with the task of building it anew with only the fabric of my

> body—what some might call "transitioning" . . . I do not walk this journey alone; rather I find myself joined at the flesh of my hips to others, to my ancestors, elders, lovers, queer friends, teachers, and strangers, to the summer-yellow-hornets who occasionally slip into the cracks of my bedroom screen door and the hornworms of my partner's wild medicine garden.[81]

In this temporal account, Leo sees transition as embedded within relationships that span generations, stretching back into the past and forward into the future.[82] Thus in Leo's account of cocooning, transition is seen not as an individual process of "self-transformation" but rather as "a radical recreating of a new world in which we can fly," such that it rejects wholesale the neoliberal co-optation of transition (understood as an individual linear process) into neoliberalism and imperialism.[83] Here, transition is understood in terms of Lugones's world-traveling, as a process of "creatively remak[ing] gender"[84] where "we world-travel in-between the histories of our Indigenous past, present, and future . . . rupturing the space of the cocoon and the worlds of sense that force Trans folks back into the violent categories of the coloniality of gender."[85] Trans identity is not abstracted from relations of care and interdependence with the world, nor is it separated from histories and processes of colonialism. Coloniality is understood as a structure predicated upon violence against trans people, and on framing them as primitive, backward, and thus without a future in (colonial) modernity.

Referring to the "trans-" prefix as a "spatial marker of possibility," Nael Bhanji argues that "it is also evocative of the *transgressions*, *transmogrifications*, and *transmutations* of established norms."[86] Trans futurity requires that we resist the power of gender normativity, particularly in its collusions with the colonial, racist, neoliberal state, as such complicity both expands the reach and power of the state and renders non-normative and racialized trans people particularly vulnerable. As Leo writes,

> A re-weaving of current relations unto decolonial possibilities requires one to not only interrogate their own positionality but to recognize the ancestral *raíces* which have sustained the ground one walks, especially when these roots solidify the knotted binds of other people's oppression.[87]

A decolonial trans of color framework centers coalitional politics as resistance against the normativizing forces of the imperial state, refusing to collude in a neo-colonial reinscription of Western dominance.

5. APPLYING THE TRANS OF COLOR FRAMEWORK

Trans(homo)nationalism extends and sustains colonial preoccupations with domination and control over those deemed deviant and "Other." As discussed in Section 1, colonial logics inscribe the violence of colonialism with the "benevolence" of bestowing upon the colonized modernity, progress, and thus, a future at all; the "primitive" colonized are brought towards this promised future through the systematic violence and destruction that characterizes the colonial project. The normative gendering processes are an extension of this relationship between the colonizer and the colonized; like Fanon's description of colonial racialization separating a subject from their independent personhood, colonial gendering involves similar dislocation. Colonial rhetoric insists on the position of cisnormative gender as the only natural, modern, and progressive expression, distinct from the unnatural (trans) non-normativity that is primarily articulated through a model of disease. It would follow, then, that individualized curative responses to (trans) non-normativity are merely colonially induced illusions of beneficiaries—i.e., medical assimilation is assumed to be the basis of trans safety and condition for survival, as non-normativity in any respect is deemed unnatural and dangerous. It should not be a surprise, then, that individual trans people take up medical assimilation with the hope of garnering sociopolitical security and longevity.[88] We find that pathologization is consistently peddled as a sustainable method of incorporating trans people into a functioning society, and so it is precisely the progress narrative that reproduces the violently medicalized logics of coloniality that allow trans(homo)nationalism to continue to operate in the West.

The state's projection of a national image of progressiveness thereby claims to benefit even those subjects who exist in the gendered margins. This projection is contested, however, when it becomes clear that the state does not grant rights categorically and unconditionally. Instead, liberal politics necessitate that trans people adhere to "white, middle class, able-bodied, heterosexual understandings of normative gendering" to be considered rights-bearing citizens.[89] It is only when a trans person fulfills these conditions that state rights are extended to the individual. When (trans) non-normativity is present in the public sphere, protections of the state falter given colonial prescriptions of danger upon visible oppositions to normative gender. It is imperative, then, that the normative gender narrative is not threatened by the presence of (trans) non-normativity; (trans) non-normativity must be assimilated into the public sphere in an effort to avoid a division of the colonial reality that naturalizes only those expressions that reasonably fit those white, middle class, able-bodied, heterosexual standards. Visible transness and euphoria are then lost, relegated to private expression that is incapable of effectively combating coloniality.

A trans of color framework is capable of articulating the colonial processes that intervene into these experiences of visibility and euphoria and of opposing assimilation through normativity. We can use a trans of color framework to understand how these processes are intertwined with (trans)homonationalism; it accounts for the way (trans)-homonationalism functions in cases of assimilation as a means of integrating subjects into a particular national imaginary. This national imaginary is, indeed, a colonial mythos: in cases where one's gender is intimately connected to a racial or cultural identity that is discounted under colonial realities, one can see the mythos interfering with individual accounts of gender and self. Akwaeke Emezi, when describing their complicated journey of accessing a gender-affirming hysterectomy, wrote:

> An *ogbanje* is an Igbo spirit that's born into a human body, a kind of malevolent trickster, whose goal is to torment the human mother by dying unexpectedly only to return in the next child and do it all over again. . . . The possibility that I was an *ogbanje* occurred to me around the same time I realized I was trans, but it took me a while to collide the two worlds. I suppressed the former for a few years because most of my education had been in the sciences and all of it was Westernized—it was difficult for me to consider an Igbo spiritual world equally, if not more valid. The legacy of colonialism had always taught us that such a world wasn't real, that it was nothing but juju and superstition. When I finally accepted its validity, I revisited what that could mean for my gender. Did *ogbanje* even have a gender to begin with? Gender is, after all, such a human thing.[90]

Without the trans of color framework, one might not be able to see how Emezi's own perception of self is affected both by normative gendering *and* colonial histories, but with such a framework one cannot help but see clearly that "transness and race are inextricably bound within the colonial project"[91] and that a project of trans liberation must see colonialism and the colonial/modern gender system as maintaining its dominance through the violent marginalization of trans people of color.

6. CONCLUSION

It is not possible for trans activism to advocate for liberation, let alone gain momentum in doing so, without taking on a decolonial politic. The possibilities for trans people to exist fully, freely, and without shame have been continually limited by models of white supremacy, pathology, and medicalization that permeate the very conceptions of trans identities. Many movements centering pro-trans politics have been unable to stipulate a means of liberation without appealing to the racialized, gendered colonial structures that work to isolate trans individuals as non-normative, perverse, or otherwise dangerous to a functioning society. The argument remains that no amount of assimilation of trans people into normative spaces can erase the effects of a colonial legacy upon racialized and gendered subjects; gender variance, gender freakiness, and outright gender fuckery cannot be eclipsed for the purpose of assimilation. A trans of color framework may be the *only* framework capable of actively resisting assimilation into the normativizing impulses of a state-medical apparatus steeped in coloniality. Indeed, moving towards a deregulated and expansive vision for trans futurity requires those "truly radical" politics that "seem to be located in [an] ability to create a space in opposition to dominant norms."[92] We find that this radical opposition and vision can be cultivated in the decolonial trans of color framework.

NOTES

1. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112.
2. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 116. Emphasis original.
3. Quijano identifies this as the "coloniality of power."
4. Lugones,"Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 189.
5. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 188.
6. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System."
7. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 188.
8. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 187. Lugones later clarifies that her work builds off other feminists of color who have continued to explore the connection between race and gender, which she says has not been "sufficiently jointly explored" (188) by more mainstream decolonial thinkers.
9. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 189; Although this paper does not directly utilize Lugones's other intent of making "visible the crucial disruption of bonds of practical solidarity" (189) between men and women of color, it is worth noting that a good portion of her paper is concerned with addressing "the indifference that men… who have racialized as inferior, exhibit to the systematic violence inflicted upon women of color" (188). Unfortunately, an article of this length is not suited to adequately explore this aspect of Lugones's work.
10. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 195–96.
11. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System, "186.
12. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 195.
13. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 196.
14. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 192.
15. Paris, "Humanism's Secret Shadow," 82.
16. Paris, "Humanism's Secret Shadow," 82.
17. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 192.
18. Lugones clarifies that default modes of gender generally only refer to European men, excluding women of any category from default gendering practices.
19. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 192.
20. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 192.
21. Adamson, "Beyond the Coloniality of Gender," 307.
22. Adamson, "Beyond the Coloniality of Gender," 301–02. Emphasis original.
23. Adamson, "Beyond the Coloniality of Gender," 304.
24. Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," 744. Hortense Spillers's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" articulates the ways in which denying the gendering as "man" or "woman" to enslaved black people operates within the dehumanization of enslavement.
25. Leo, "Colonial/Modern [Cis]Gender System," 455.
26. Leo, "Colonial/Modern [Cis]Gender System," 461.
27. Leo, "Colonial/Modern [Cis]Gender System," 467.
28. Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 2.
29. In "Extermination of the *Joyas*," Deborah Miranda explains that Spanish colonial forces, upon discovering third gender populations in California, reorganized their own gender structure to include a denomination solely associated with indigeneity. The *Joyas*, a title created by the Spanish, operated outside the realm of colonial notions of gender because of their status as not only racialized subjects but gendered as well.
30. Adamson, "Beyond the Coloniality of Gender," 307.

31. Adamson, "Beyond the Coloniality of Gender," 304.
32. Spade, "Resisting Medicine/Remodeling Gender," 24–25.
33. shuster, *Trans Medicine*, 24.
34. shuster, *Trans Medicine*, 31.
35. shuster, *Trans Medicine*, 36.
36. shuster, *Trans Medicine*, 44.
37. shuster, *Trans Medicine*, 40.
38. See Riggs et al., "Transnormativity in the Psy Disciplines"; Ruin, "Discussing Transnormativity through Transfeminisms."
39. shuster, *Trans Medicine*, 32.
40. Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back," 225.
41. Malatino, *Side Affects*, 25.
42. Malatino, *Side Affects*, 32.
43. Adamson, "Beyond the Coloniality of Gender," 312.
44. Lugones, "Heterosexism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," 195.
45. Adamson, "Beyond the Coloniality of Gender," 311.
46. Vipond, "Resisting Transnormativity," 32.
47. Vipond, "Resisting Transnormativity," 36.
48. Spade, "Resisting Medicine/Remodeling Gender," 24.
49. Spade, "Resisting Medicine/Remodeling Gender," 24.
50. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 2.
51. Duggan, "The New Homonormativity," 50. Cited in Currah, "Homonationalism, State Rationalities, and Sex Contradictions."
52. Duggan, "The New Homonormativity," 179.
53. Currah, "Homonationalism, State Rationalities, and Sex Contradictions."
54. Sycamore, *That's Revolting*, 1–5.
55. Currah, "Homonationalism, State Rationalities, and Sex Contradictions," 3.
56. Puar, "Rethinking Homonationalism," 336. For more on the relationship between post 9/11 security state and surveillance in relation to trans and gender non-conforming people, see Beauchamp, "Artful Concealment and Strategic Visibility: Transgender Bodies and U.S. State Surveillance After 9/11" (2009), who argues that: "The monitoring of transgender and gender-nonconforming populations is inextricable from questions of national security and regulatory practices of the state, and state surveillance policies that may first appear unrelated to transgender people are in fact deeply rooted in the maintenance and enforcement of normatively gendered bodies, behaviors and identities" (356–57).
57. "A gay rights agenda fights for an end to discrimination in housing and employment, but not for the *provision* of housing or jobs; domestic partner health coverage, but not universal health coverage. Or, more recently, hospital visitation and inheritance rights for married couples, but not for anyone else. Even with the most obviously 'gay' issue, that of anti-queer violence, a gay rights agenda fights for tougher hate crimes legislation, instead of fighting the racism, classism, transphobia (and homophobia) intrinsic to the criminal 'justice' system" (Sycamore, *That's Revolting*, 2).
58. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, xx. Emphasis added.
59. Puar, "Bodies with New Organs."
60. Puar, "Bodies with New Organs," 46.
61. Stryker and Aizura, "Introduction: Transgender Studies 2.0," 10.
62. Puar, "Bodies with New Organs," 46.
63. Haritaworn and Snorton, "Trans Necropolitics," 67.
64. Aizura, "Of Borders and Homes," 290.
65. Aizura, "Of Borders and Homes," 290.
66. Stryker and Aizura, "Introduction: Transgender Studies 2.0," 4.
67. Queer politics takes many forms, and there have been large, complicated disputes between queer theorists on what exactly queer theory should be. In "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," Cathy J. Cohen tells us that queer theory is rooted in postmodernism and should oppose the liberal, hegemonizing tendencies of earlier gay and lesbian studies and activism. For Cohen and for us, this means taking on a distinctly anti-assimilationist politic. See also Sycamore, *That's Revolting*, and Spade, "Resisting Medicine/Remodeling Gender."
68. Spade, "Resisting Medicine/Remodeling Gender," 23.
69. Horak, "Trans on YouTube," 579.
70. Horak, "Trans on YouTube," 581.
71. Fisher et al., "Introduction: Trans Temporalities," 2.
72. Fisher et al., "Introduction: Trans Temporalities," 4.
73. Malatino, *Side Affects*, 25–26.
74. Ruin, "Discussing Transnormativities through Transfeminism," 204.
75. Malatino, *Side Affects*, 27.
76. Malatino, *Side Affects*, 27.
77. Chen and cárdenas, "Times to Come," 473.
78. Chen and cárdenas, "Times to Come," 474.
79. Stryker, "Biopolitics," 41.
80. Chen and cárdenas, "Times to Come," 475.
81. Leo, "Colonial/Modern [Cis]Gender System," 468.
82. Leo ("Colonial/Modern [Cis]Gender System") draws on the work of Indigenous scholar Kyle Whyte to describe "intergenerational time—a perspective embedded in spiraling temporality (sense of time) in which it makes sense to consider ourselves as living alongside future and past relatives simultaneously as we walk through life" (Whyte, "Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene," 229, as cited in Leo, "Colonial/Modern [Cis] Gender System," 468).
83. Leo, "Colonial/Modern [Cis]Gender System," 455.
84. Leo, "Colonial/Modern [Cis]Gender System," 460.
85. Leo, "Colonial/Modern [Cis]Gender System," 470.
86. Bhanji, "Trans/scriptions," 521. Emphasis original.
87. Leo, "Colonial/Modern [Cis]Gender System," 459.
88. But, as we noted earlier, normativity is not achievable for most, if any, trans subjects (see Malatino, *Side Affects*).
89. Beauchamp, "Artful Concealment and Strategic Visibility," 47.
90. Emezi, "Transition." Emphasis original.
91. Leo, "Colonial/Modern [Cis]Gender System," 455.
92. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," 22.

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Trans Philosophy: A Tale of Two Futures

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I have been involved in trans philosophy as a gardener, trying to nurture it into being, as something that is not yet fully present, fully upon us, or fully here. I was involved in the first conference explicitly devoted to trans philosophy, held back in 2016 at the University of Oregon. In addition to organizing the roundtable on trans life in the profession, I spoke there of the cisnormative exclusions that constitute public space.[1] The meta resonance of my remarks was not lost on me. At the time, trans philosophy and trans philosophers were, by and large, constitutively excluded from philosophy, jettisoned as wasted thoughts, wasted energies, and an embarrassment to clean thinking, best shuttled away out of the everyday life of philosophy as a discipline. What would it mean for gender non-conformity, and a philosophy accountable to it, to take up space in the heart of philosophy itself? As a retrospective on the conference, I wrote an APA blog post making recommendations for the inclusion (a frame I now find quite limiting) of trans philosophy and trans philosophers in the field.[2] To my knowledge, this is the first time that the phrase "trans philosophy," as currently understood, was used in publication.[3]

Then and since, I did not spend much time thinking about trans philosophy's future (or futures), only about securing its presence. I turned to work co-initiating and supporting the Thinking Trans // Trans Thinking Conference and the Trans Philosophy Project. I set pen to paper to help expand the legibility of trans philosophy as an enterprise, especially to enhance the legitimacy of junior scholars working in the area. These efforts included a *Stanford Encyclopedia* entry on "Trans Philosophy" and the first collection of *Trans Philosophy*.[4] In addition to the work of the present, I also became obsessed with trans philosophy's pasts, excavating the early years and early commitments of trans philosophizing in the US.[5] I wrote my own book of trans philosophy: *How We Make Each Other: Trans Life at the Edge of the University*, and I just finished another, which offers a critical history of the term *cisgender*—a term generated and theorized by trans people, including trans philosophers, over the last three decades. These are the records of a gardener, however, not a seer.

I *still* have not thought much about trans philosophy's future(s). To have a future, one must already have a present and a past. In building trans philosophy's present and excavating trans philosophy's past, trans philosophy's future has, for me at least, gone underthought. I welcome the opportunity of this special issue to pause and to reflect.

From where we are, where are we going (or where could we be going)? If we shifted our weight on our feet (or in our knees, our hips, or our shoulders) could we end up somewhere else? And what is desirable here—on what grounds and for whom? What I will propose in the following pages is that, in chiseling out the figure of trans philosophy, we are already at risk of having chiseled away what I take to be one of its constitutive elements: accountability to and in trans community. I argue that *for the sake of its future, trans philosophy must be (re)rooted in trans sociality*.

1. HEWING STONE

There are many ways to tell the story of trans philosophy coming into its own. One could start with the moment the term *trans philosophy* was spoken or appeared in print; or one could start with the philosophizing that self-described "trans" people have been doing for decades; or one could start well before (and importantly beyond) the use of the term *trans* at all. One could start with the material practices and social structures agglomerating around the term *trans philosophy* (e.g., conferences, publications, outreach initiatives, etc.); or one could start with the academic conditions that enabled trans people to survive in higher education long enough to initiate a new subfield (e.g., feminism, LGBT studies, DEI efforts, etc.); or one could start with the emergent conditions of trans wisdom (and the love of it) that are developed and sustained outside the university (e.g., activism, care circles, survival tactics, etc.). It matters how the story gets told—and where it starts. I am invested in all of these ways of telling the story, especially those ways that upset our already underthought attachments to trans and to philosophy as well as to the West and to the university. "Trans philosophy" is not only an academic formation, nor is it purely a liberatory one.

Today, however, I would like to trace the story of *trans philosophy* not by way of discourse or material conditions, but rather by way of feeling. I want to begin with the feelings of frustration and of anger. Back in the mid-1990s, the atmosphere was saturated with non-trans academics and medical professionals theorizing, diagnosing, and treating trans people. People with positions and power—people produced by and often sustained by higher education—took trans people as their objects of study and made lucrative careers out of us. Trans folks were fed up. In this moment, frustration was a trans public feeling.[6] Over and over again, we were pathologized; over and over again, we were silenced. Hale's "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans__" was a product of this moment.[7] He wrote from a deeply communal space of activism, sex radicalism, and personal friendships, and he wrote against those who knew nothing of that space: he names people from Harvard, Yale, UCLA, Penn State, and UMass Amherst. Posted and reposted to listservs and websites, his rules caught like wildfire.

An artifact of trans community, the rules were also a trans philosophy artifact. Hale was a pre-tenure philosophy professor at California State University, Northridge. Two of his four primary interlocutors for the piece were philosophy professors, too. The contribution of the "Rules," moreover, is a philosophical one: trans lives cannot be understood on non-trans terms, for non-trans ends. Trans knowledge is built in and sustained by trans community, and any who would taste of this knowledge must "travel in our trans worlds."[8] All else is folly. Hale directs his injunctions explicitly to non-trans people: *Practice humility. Don't objectify, fetishize, and subjectivize us or what we think, say, or do. Don't totalize us. Don't assume our lives are mere suffering or an impossibility. We live them; hence, they are livable. If we engage with you, it is a gift; take it as such*. In his prefatory remarks, however, he writes that many of the rules also apply "to trans-folk writing across trans-trans differences."[9] The wisdom, in that case, would be the same. Trans knowledges are built in trans communities. If you would speak of a trans experience that is not your own, learn to travel in that world and honor those who walk that path.

Years, even decades, followed. Viviane Namaste published her important essay insisting trans people no longer be objects of feminist theory but be made participants in the theorization process.[10] More strongly, Susan Stryker argued, in her introduction to the first *Transgender Studies Reader*, that trans people do not need to be included in a pre-existing knowledge production process; they are already trans knowers and already stewards of trans knowledge.[11] Blas Radi argued that whatever trans knowledge produces, it is never simply a critique of non-trans knowledge; rather, we make creative contributions in our own right.[12] Betwixt and between these landmark essays, a growing chorus of voices insisted that trans people have theoretical insights into classical philosophical questions about the nature of embodiment, knowledge, personal identity, metaphysics, politics, and history. A growing coterie also argued that the project of desubjugating trans knowledges and trans people cannot be divorced from efforts to dismantle settler-colonialism, racism, ableism, and class politics. Our (trans) theoretical insights into philosophical questions, however, were not yet called "trans philosophy."

Enter the first trans philosophy conference in the US and a return to feeling. As Megan Burke, one of the organizers, recalls, the word "f*ck" was everywhere over those three fateful days in May 2016.[13] "F*ck this" and "f*ck that." "F*ck philosophy" and "f*ck the world," but also "we're f*cking doing philosophy" and "we're f*cking building worlds." "It was a real mood," as Burke puts it. As one of the keynotes, alongside C. Riley Snorton, Talia Bettcher galvanized that mood by offering the preliminary remarks for what would become her field-defining 2019 essay "What Is Trans Philosophy?"[14] From that stage and the later essay, she argued that, while philosophy begins with a cultivated perplexity about a world that philosophical questions make strange, trans philosophy begins in a natural perplexity about an already strange world that prompts philosophical questions. Perplexity is a cognitive affect. It is typically defined as a state of feeling confused or bewildered, a state in which one becomes anxious or frustrated by not understanding something. Perplexity is a trans public feeling, Bettcher implies, a feeling shared across trans people in a transphobic world. It is a "WTF" feeling. As such, trans philosophy does not start with engaging in traditional philosophical literature to prompt traditional philosophical questions. It starts on the ground, with trans consternations

and the philosophical perplexity of trans people. But it is also more than this.

For Bettcher, trans philosophy starts not only on the ground but on specific grounds:

> Trans philosophy needs to proceed from pretheoretical sociality among trans people—whatever form that takes—standing in a relation of resistance to the prevailing mainstream world of WTF. [. . .] It's culturally, geographically, and temporally indexed. I write from my own personal experiences in various Los Angeles trans subcultures from around the mid-1990s to the present.[15]

It is trans subcultures in LA, "discursive and nondiscursive practices," that inform Bettcher's philosophical questions and intuitions.[16] "Alternative socialites are required" for trans philosophy, she baldly asserts, as the *pretheoretical* ground.[17] A trans philosophizing that strays increasingly far from trans socialities and trans subcultures "through repeated iterations of literature engagement alone" has a higher likelihood of obfuscating rather than illuminating trans life.[18] This is not to say we should be blasé about which literatures we engage with and the hard work of "literature travel," she is quick to acknowledge, but it is to say that literature engagement is neither a sufficient nor a primary means of generating trans philosophy.[19] Invoking María Lugones's conception of worlds and world-traveling, Bettcher concludes that the question of "How one lives one's life, with whom one develops bonds of sociality and intimacy, becomes an integral component of [trans] philosophical methodology."[20]

To my knowledge, Hale's "Rules" was the first philosophical piece by a trans philosopher, in the US, to receive wide uptake in academic and non-academic circles. Bettcher's "What Is Trans Philosophy?" was the first piece, written by a trans philosopher, in the US, to name and theorize "trans philosophy" as a unique philosophical subfield and practice. As such, the two offer an orienting constellation for at least one strand of trans philosophy. Crucially, Hale and Bettcher are longtime friends. They are part of the LA trans scene together and have engaged in trans activism, sex radicalism, and community building there for decades. They move in each other's worlds, sharing feelings of frustration, anger, perplexity, and urgency, and they philosophize from there. Whatever trans philosophy is and whatever its futures, these figures from its past and present insist that trans philosophy be rooted in trans sociality—especially in non-academic trans subcultures, discursive and non-discursive trans practices, and the on-the-ground resistance of trans life.

2. CHISELING OUT THE SHAPE

That might be how it started, but how is it going? I was surprised recently to attend several talks, panels, and colloquia purportedly dedicated to "trans philosophy" but where non-trans and trans people alike made non-accountable, totalizing claims about trans experience. I have reviewed paper after paper, written by trans and non-trans people alike, that continue to make claims about trans lives and propose theoretical innovations with respect to them without demonstrable knowledge of relevant trans literatures, histories, or communities. Good, well-meaning trans and non-trans people are writing things because they sound philosophical, rather than because they are sound trans philosophy. They write things on traditional philosophical terms to make traditional philosophical sense without attending to where their arguments come from or what they might do to actual trans people.[21] Interpreted generously, perhaps these efforts are so focused on contending with cisnormativity that they think their way out of trans community.

I worry that in chiseling out trans philosophy in these ways, we are actively chiseling away one essential element of the trans philosophical project: trans sociality. Indeed, I worry that as we press into trans philosophy's future, the first thing to get cut is our ties. But, the reader might object, that is probably only true of people doing trans philosophy badly. What about the careful philosophers who are producing trans accountable work that argues for trans accountability? Here, too, I find an implicit move away from trans sociality as a bedrock of trans philosophizing. Specifically, I find calls to read trans philosophers and heed first-person accounts of trans experience, but in the absence of accountability to trans communities and their many non-verbal, extra-textual cultural elements. Let me give a few concrete examples. I take, as my inroad, trans philosophers' theorizations of cisnormativity and their commensurate calls to trans accountability.

In "Cisgender Commonsense and Philosophy's Gender Trouble," Robin Dembroff diagnoses why philosophy is so hellbent on making pronouncements about transgender life while being dismissive of what trans people actually say.[22] It all has to do with philosophy's "cisgender commonsense," which is buoyed by a singular commitment: "Don't read—just think." Such an injunction to think drives "cisgender" philosophers back to their own intuitions about gender. No wonder, then, that their work gets off base so quickly! In response, Dembroff implicitly urges, "Go read!" Be informed about the literature produced by "trans studies and trans voices" and make your philosophical pronouncements from there.[23] Strangely, however, Dembroff's own citations to trans voices are quite limited. They cite a personal communication with Stephanie Kapusta, a public letter they wrote with Susan Stryker and Quill Kukla, and two blog posts (only one of which they engage) by Talia Bettcher and Samantha Hancox-Li, respectively. With the incredible breadth of trans philosophizing and trans theorizing available, especially on this very topic of non-trans people pontificating about trans people, Dembroff's choice is a strange one. It suggests that while "cis" philosophers ought to read work by trans people, we as trans philosophers need not read each other and we certainly need not do more than read. It is enough to be trans and to reason from there.

In "Cis Sense and the Habit of Gender Assignment," Megan Burke extends Dembroff's analysis of cis commonsense from the context of analytic philosophy to the world.[24] Utilizing classical phenomenological literature and methods, Burke argues that if "cisgender commonsense" is "the how of academic philosophy," by which cisnormative

intuitions always win the day, then "cis sense" is "the how of everyday perception," by which cisnormative gender ascriptions win the day.[25] In a world of cis sense, it matters not what "my sense" of my gender is; my gender is whatever cis sense accords me. My sense is nonsense. Cis sense "undermines if not entirely diminishes the meaning 'I' make, or might want to make, of myself."[26] Within trans contexts, however, a "trans sense" reigns that "hold[s] open" the opportunity for "me" to make sense of myself.[27] In contrast to the citation politics of Dembroff's essay, Burke cites multiple papers by trans and nonbinary theorists (e.g., Bettcher, Butler, Malatino, and Spade), including papers that theorize cisness (e.g., Ansara, Dembroff, and Enke). It is not, however, to reading that Burke calls us. It is to the self-determinative rights of the "I" and the "me." Again, it seems, it is enough to be trans and to build my gender and my gender thoughts from there.[28]

Non-trans philosophers have reiterated these calls to trans texts and trans intuitions. In "Becoming Cisgender," Louise Richardson-Self argues for the necessity of non-trans people not only acknowledging their cis status but "becoming cis," embracing what it means for their political resistance practice.[29] It is cis people's responsibility to reject their own "privileged recognitive failure," by which they see themselves as men or women rather than cis men or cis women.[30] They ought instead to adopt "cis" as an "epistemic resource" for reckoning with power structures and begin the work of undoing them.[31] Such "self-recognition," however, must "be paired with apprenticeship to trans texts," Richardson-Self argues.[32] Indeed "an active apprenticeship to the texts of trans folks" is "obligatory" for cis people.[33] The goal of apprenticeship is to gain "substantive, rich understanding" of cisgender status, cisnormativity, and trans resistance.[34] Richardson-Self explicitly situates her appeal to trans texts with a reference to Dembroff's call to read. For her, however, light reading is not enough; the trans texts that cisgender people read and the epistemic authority of those who write them need to sink into their bones.

Granting philosophy's gender trouble, the rise of gender-critical feminists, and political disputes over trans lives, Kate Manne, in a recent essay for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, similarly makes a case that trans philosophers be read.[35] The primary reason that they should be read, however, is not because readers need to have their cisnormative assumptions corrected or their cis privilege illuminated (although that will happen as a byproduct), but because trans philosophy is a helpful tool to address our current moment of trans panic. It is a prime example of philosophy mattering, Manne argues. The resources of trans philosophy, however, are going unrecognized and unplumbed. "I worry that if we go on as we have before," Manne muses, "we will end up with a discipline and even a world in which there will be fewer and fewer trans thinkers to learn from."[36] After engaging with Bettcher's work and then naming thirty other trans philosophers and theorists (Dembroff first among them), Manne closes her essay with three simple words: "Go read them."[37] Manne thus models precisely what circulates, in the academy, as best practice in trans accountability: Read.

It is a model of best practice I have used and endorsed. In that APA blog post after the first US trans philosophy conference, before enjoining privileged trans philosophers, university administrators, and non-trans allies to use their power to effect trans inclusion in the field (a framing I now find incomplete and patronizing), I cited work by Bettcher, Veronica Ivy, Loren Cannon, Dembroff, and C. Riley Snorton, all academics. I concluded, "The future of trans philosophy lies in doing, as much as in engaging with, work like this:" i.e., philosophical work on trans issues by trans philosophers and theorists.[38] Then as now, I too believe that trans philosophy and trans accountable philosophy must engage with scholarly literature produced by trans people and grapple with first-person accounts of trans life. But this is not all I have come to believe.

I mean to put this starkly: as trans academics, we are not born into a scholarly politics that has trans justice at its heart simply by virtue of being trans ourselves. That must be learned, and it must be sought as an always unfinished project. I started reading trans histories, doing trans oral histories, going to trans support groups, participating in peer-to-peer trans counseling, and socializing with local trans organizations. I got to know more trans academics (students, staff, and faculty) and I acquired trans family and friends. I studied trans autobiographies.[39] Working closely with trans and non-trans collaborators, I came face to face with the white, US-centric, and sane and able-bodyminded assumptions I had about trans thought and trans experience. I stared repeatedly into the dizzying preference academics have for theory done by other academics, rather than by people on the ground. And I became saturated with the bigness of trans and non-trans gender disruptive life, especially outside of those professional academic publishing circuits. I could not shake the wisdom I found there, nor the complexity that would rebuff any simplistic appeals to philosophical clarity, universal truth, or definitive definition.

I realized something. I do not want to live in a world of philosophy, or of trans philosophy, that is accountable merely to trans philosophers or trans academics who have written some things. A small coterie of well-educated people trained to take their own thoughts more seriously than others. I have heard more times than I can count philosophers—including trans philosophers—opining about their superior ability to illuminate the messy world of everyday people. I do not want a trans philosophy that assumes the superiority of the written word ("texts") and the primacy of the individual subject ("I") who avows thus-and-so. This is not a future I want. Nor do I want a trans accountability that is, in practice, an accountability to a handful or two of academics who happen to be trans and who may very well write without accountability to their own or other trans communities (if they even have them). I do not want a trans accountability that assumes the "trans ordinary" is the ordinary life of choice few trans academics—or that there is a geographically, temporally, and culturally universal trans ordinary at all.[40] I also do not want a culture of trans accountability or of trans philosophy that supervenes on a popularity game, where a handful of "big names" are cultivated (and vied for) via professional circles and social media as the voice of trans or of trans

philosophy (e.g., Bettcher, Dembroff, etc.), instead of each and every one of us aspiring to be listeners of trans and non-trans gender disruptive voices.

I want a different future for trans philosophy. One that does not replicate, in its constitution, some of the very same structures that subjugate trans knowledges in the first place.

3. SAVING THE CHIPS

We are well past the moment of hewing stone. *Trans philosophy* is a recognized (if sometimes derided) term. People across multiple continents refer to themselves and others as trans philosophers doing trans philosophy. Conferences, colloquia, courses, and class modules, not to mention articles and books, proliferate under its name. We are now in the moment of chiseling out what trans philosophy is and will be. As I have argued, one of the things that is being chiseled away, in that process of chiseling out, is the rootedness of trans philosophy in trans sociality. Trans philosophy is actively becoming a project among trans and non-trans academics that, much like traditional philosophy, functions primarily via textual argumentation and individual intuition. Its accountability is, if we are lucky, to the intuition, reason, and literature of a few trans philosophers and theorists. It is at this moment that I find myself wanting to hit the brakes. Push pause. Run around saving the chips.

What does it mean to (re)root trans philosophy in trans sociality? It means, in Bettcher's terms, to take the discursive and nondiscursive *pretheoretical* practices of trans subcultures as the ground of philosophizing. From Hale's perspective, it means philosophizing in and with those already *theorizing* in trans subcultural spaces. Non-academic Dexter D. Fogt was one of Hale's interlocutors for the "Rules."[41] As "litter mates," the two started transition together and worked through a lot together. That working through involved talk—conversations spoken and written, in real life and across changing social media platforms. But it also involved activity. They frequented gay bars, drag clubs, queer core clubs, marches, protests, and so forth together. They even made a cameo in a short film about bathroom cruising at UCLA.[42] Hale's philosophical insights are learned from and built with those who engaged with him in these discursive and non-discursive practices, these collectively crafted spaces of trans language and trans embodiment. But Hale and Bettcher are not the only ones to point to here.

I want to tell two stories of trans philosophy's rootedness in discursive and non-discursive trans subcultural practices, and I want to grant in advance the theoretical vibrancy of those practices. Let me begin with the latter. In 2019, Susan Stryker keynoted the annual conference of the second largest philosophy organization in the US: the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP). Stryker titled her address, "How Being Trans Made Me a Philosopher!" To a who's who crowd of continental and pluralist philosophers, seated in the Pittsburgh Marriott's Grand Ballroom, she cited Gaston Bachelard, Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, Sigmund Freud, Elizabeth Grosz, Luce Irigaray, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Plato—a perfect SPEP lineup. As one of the precious few trans philosophers in the audience, I was proud to see a trans studies heavyweight at the front. Stryker focused her remarks on trans history, as one might expect, but also on the San Francisco sex dungeons she frequented in the 1990s.[43] Her descriptions were frankly explicit. I could feel collared necks reddening around me, and I felt a certain embarrassment. Her remarks were offered "in the spirit of 'pornosophy' [. . .] the militant insistence on an epistemic parity between the disparate knowledges of the scientist, the philosopher, and the whore—and as a refusal to discredit what our own carnality can teach us."[44] Trans life far exceeds academic etiquette. As such, trans philosophy must be—militantly—an impure mixture of epistemic resources, methodological techniques, orienting values, and presuppositions.

How did being trans make Stryker a philosopher? She did not become a trans philosopher by merely "identifying" as trans and philosophizing from there, or musing over her trans intuitions, or putting her trans life through the sieve of traditional philosophical methods or literatures. Rather, she became a trans philosopher by participating in queer and trans BDSM spaces, where the author of the trans self and of trans thought dissolves into dungeon intimacies. Pain and pleasure. Rhythm and ritual. Role substitution across continuous play scenes. There is not a who here; there is a making. She writes:

> S/M had become for me [. . .] a technology for the production of (trans)gendered embodiment, a mechanism for dismembering and disarticulating received patterns of identification, affect, sensation, and appearance, and for configuring, coordinating, and remapping them in bodily space. [. . .] Transsexual masochism affords me a glimpse of non-unique revolutionary potentials [. . .], demonstrating how body modification can become a site of social transformation, proving that the real can be materialized differently than it now is or once was.[45]

For Stryker, the "poesis" of dungeon space holds the transformative power to remake body and world together, transing the existing configurations of each.[46] Witnessing and physically participating in this subcultural scene, as world-theorizing and world-changing, is the foundation of Stryker's trans philosophizing.

But now let me tell the second story, this time of trans philosophy's rootedness in discursive trans subcultural practices. On September 9–10, 2015, Judith Butler joined host and queer theorist Richard Miskolci to offer the Queer Seminar I in São Paulo, Brazil. Purportedly concerned with subversive identities, the seminar centered in part on trans and travesti lives. Seminar leaders were reportedly cis, white, middle class, and university educated. Not one was trans or travesti. Public attendees, a cohort of whom were trans and travesti theorists and activists, from in and outside the academy, "bitingly renamed" the event the "Queer Cisminar," Argentine trans philosopher Blas Radi recalls.[47] "*Cisminar* [*cisminario*]" was a linguistic innovation, a moment of creative epistemological contribution.

According to local lesbian transfeminist bloggers Aylín and Irassema, the term *cisminar* names:

> a specialized technical or academic gathering of cis people who are also cissexists, which tries to develop an in-depth study of trans issues without including real-life trans people or by masquerading them to fit their theories, ignoring and erasing their life experiences. Its motto could well be, "my theories are more important than your experiences."[48]

When pressed, Butler and Miskolci reportedly both doubted the capacity of "cisness" to describe queer people.[49] Miskolci also doubted whether trans people have the theoretical vocabulary to participate in theorizing their own experiences.[50]

Needless to say, the event created a stir. Perhaps most striking in the fallout are the repeated injunctions to abandon traditional academic venues and instead return to and build alternative poetic spaces and socialities. Reporting on the incident, *Blogueiras Negras* author Thayz Athayde writes, "Let us not be afraid of this other place we can build. May we not be afraid to leave a hegemonic, sanitized place, in addition to recognizing our own privileges. May we build subordinate places, knowledge and vocabularies."[51] Radi, who confronted Butler himself, similarly admits to a deep frustration with the cisminar and with academic cisnormativity. He invites trans and travesti people to pivot elsewhere.

> For my part, I cannot call to break an alliance [between trans/travesti people and feminist/queer theorists] that does not exist. I do invite trans people and those who intend to examine and transform academic inquiry and/or investigate and renew the mechanisms for building local political agendas, to vacate these spaces and build from another place.[52]

Trans communities are always at the philosophical work of illuminating their own lives. As an exemplary instance, the term *cisminar* critiques worlds that continue to capitalize on trans topics but exclude trans knowledges, trans people, and trans subcultures. *Cisminar*, however, does more than diagnose the system that refuses us; it also refuses that system's grasp on our imaginations and our tongues and our enfleshed presence. Some enterprises deserve to be abandoned. Academia will sometimes be one.

In arguing that trans philosophy be rooted in trans sociality, I take Hale, Bettcher, Stryker, and Radi as (some of) my guideposts. I do not mean to suggest that trans philosophy is best rooted in trans philosophers hanging out at APA conference bars, nor that trans philosophy is best evidenced when trans philosophers, especially in elite circles, cite (and overcite) each other's work. I mean something harder, riskier, less philosophically and professionally palatable. Rooting trans philosophy in trans sociality involves taking discursive and non-discursive practices of trans subcultures—and, indeed, the alternative poesis and theorizing they already generate—as the grounds of collective thought. I am under no illusions here. Doing philosophical work grounded in trans sociality, which by and large exists outside the academy, will necessarily involve, at least for trans philosophers situated within the academy, failing certain philosophical norms and leaving certain philosophical spaces. It will require being an embarrassment and sometimes an exile.[53] I insist on this because the *trans* in trans philosophy has to point to something more robust than academic philosophers who happen to be trans, thinking their philosophical thoughts in their cozy classrooms and offices. It is time we pivot from insisting non-trans people be accountable to us and begin reckoning with the contours of our own accountability.

4. FOR THE FUTURE'S SAKE (FFS)

I take trans philosophizing, as a project, to already be occurring in and outside of the academy. Trans philosophy within the academy, like any other philosophical subfield dedicated to a marginalized group (e.g., feminist philosophy, queer philosophy, Africana philosophy, Indigenous philosophy, Latinx philosophy, philosophy of disability, etc.), risks reinstituting methods and perspectives from traditional academic philosophy that, by its better lights, it would resist. The replication of dominant frameworks is especially likely during this moment in which trans philosophy, even if only in small ways, is being institutionalized. Co-optation is to be expected in the university, where dominant modes of analysis quickly assimilate new knowledge sources.[54] Getting folded in means getting your teeth filed down—or never growing them. Reflecting on the "unavoidable tendency of subaltern counter-knowledges to wind up co-opted by and/or confirming the leading ways of knowing," Otto Maduro enjoins members of subaltern communities to cultivate a fundamental epistemic humility with respect to their own discourses.[55] In chiseling out what trans philosophy is and will be, there is reason to take stock of what is being smuggled in, despite our better judgment and our best intentions.

It is in the spirit of epistemic humility that I offer, then, a tale of two cities. Of two pills. Of two futures. There is a future of trans philosophy before us, one toward which we are fast hurtling. Such a future

1. Reiterates the centrality of academic attention.
2. Insists upon the individual as the primary source of meaning and value.
3. Reinscribes the dominance of the written word.
4. Maintains the primacy of agonistic argument and assertions of "my account."
5. Separates the thinker from the social context in which they become capable of thinking.
6. Demands but disavows the continued (inter) dependencies of that thinker.

Sure, such a trans philosophy is led by professional trans philosophers and concerned with trans issues, but its epistemological commitments and methodological styles

do little to disturb traditional philosophical ones. It, too, will privilege the I's intuitions and textual argumentation over and against accountable social practice and collective conversation. It, too, will be bedeviled by small circles of elite university leadership. We have every reason to believe that such a trans philosophy will get uptake in academic philosophy as a viable, if marginal, subfield and will even be used, at times, to prove philosophy's liberalism and assuage "cis" guilt.

There is another future of trans philosophy before us, one toward which we would need to pivot if it is to mark anything other than trans philosophy's own margins. Those involved in that future would

1. Write, speak, and create from non-academic contexts and deep intimacies.

2. Centralize concepts and practices used, theorized, and contested in trans communities.

3. Honor non-verbal, non-written expression and experimentation as forms of theorizing.

4. Cultivate a listening practice and distill collective wisdom.

5. Tether themselves to the alternative socialities from and for which they query.

6. Focus on their own (trans) accountability to their own and other (trans) communities.

Such a trans philosophy will be led by trans and non-trans gender-disruptive philosophers and theorists, in and outside the academy, concerned with issues relevant to their communities and who, across continents, philosophize as part of and collaboratively with those communities.[56] As such, it will be a kind of "public philosophy" that bears none of the patronizing and saviorist assumptions that term can so often imply, nor its presumption of university-centered outreach. We have every reason to believe that such a trans philosophy will have difficulty making inroads in professional philosophy. It is unlikely to be well received. Indeed, at specific junctures of epistemological methods and theoretical content, it will be an embarrassment. In this future, trans philosophy does not serve the emperor, but rather breaks the water pitcher and may look, from a long way off, like flies.[57]

This story of two futures dramatizes two possible relationships to traditional philosophy. As practiced, traditional philosophy insists upon the primacy of the academy, the written word, and the singular individual. Such an insistence is, however, a historical contingency. Across history, philosophizing has occurred, by turns, quite outside of the university (which dates to the ninth century), apart from the written word, and without final attachment to a singular individual; and it has been practiced through engagement with everyday conversations, theater, music, literature, religion, and other cultural practices and artifacts, not to mention scientific data. While there is a future in which trans philosophy doubles down on these three professional norms (i.e., academy, text, individual), there is another future in which trans philosophy, precisely because it stems from and is accountable to trans subcultures, resists them. This second sort of trans philosophy takes, as fundamental to its project, the everyday, the non-written, the nonverbal, the relational, and the collective. It takes these things as a ground upon which it germinates as much as a ground to which it accountably returns.

To be clear, the non-academic, the social, and the relational are not, in themselves, fail-safes or godsends. But they are, nevertheless, essential to trans philosophy and its ground. Of course, there remain open questions as to the nature of trans sociality that, if we are to turn in this direction, we will need to ask (if not finally answer): What distinguishes the alternative sociality of trans subcultures and, for that matter, of non-trans gender-disruptive subcultures? In what ways are trans asocialities constitutive of trans socialities?[58] What are the roles of physical and virtual space in the constitution of trans socialities? What is the role of embodiment (and its disintegration) in them? Do alternative socialities include present and past participants? In what ways do our ancestors figure into them? Are fictive members of alternative socialities as legitimate as non-fictive ones? What is the role of artistic expression in not only cultivating but constituting trans and non-trans gender disruptive subcultures? I could go on. As important as such "what is" questions are, however, I find there is another, still more urgent, set: the "how" questions.

5. EXPANDING METHODS AND MATERIALS

In "What Is Trans Philosophy?" Bettcher argues that philosophy is guided by empiricism—not in the simplistic sense of social science data collection and analysis, but in a simpliciter sense of each philosopher's own "worldly engagement" with their surroundings.[59]

> We eat, read, sleep. We walk around. We talk to people. Perhaps we buy milk. We live in some everyday, and we possess a worldly perception that I take to include not only our lived experiences, but also our knowledge of local common sense, as well as familiarity with the social practices that shape experiences and in which "common sense" inheres.[60]

Trans philosophy for her, too, is guided by empiricism. Because trans folks live in a WTF world, however, they have an "alternative worldly perception" and an "alternative form of the social."[61] Trans philosophy is grounded in those alternative perceptions and social experiences. If I can offer an oversimplification of the trans philosophical process, for Bettcher, it would be this: Be a (trans) philosopher worldly engaged in the discursive and nondiscursive pretheoretical practices of trans subcultures and then "think really hard."[62] It is enough to be a (trans) philosopher, in a trans subculture, and theorize from there.

For me, Bettcher's characterization still insufficiently roots trans philosophy in trans sociality. For her, trans philosophy is a scholarly practice grounded in the trans ordinary. When she speaks of trans philosophers—or philosophers in general—here, they are such by virtue of their standing in the

academy. If, in the nascent discussion of trans philosophy today, a thin sense of accountability to trans philosophers and their texts is commonly mobilized, Bettcher calls for a thicker sense of academic accountability to non-academic trans worlds of sense. I want to press for a still thicker sense of accountability, however, to the people and materials that sustain those worlds and the philosophizing already happening there. For me, trans philosophy is not simply the practice of an academic philosopher, who happens to be trans, wading into trans subcultural spaces, making some observations, and then retreating into their head to produce theory. It is not the practice of simply applying their expertise in critical history, argument structure, textual analysis, intuition-pumping, and thought experiments to the trans forms of life around them and their own. Trans philosophy is already happening in and must grow from the materials and the people that constitute trans subcultural worlds *and* must do so accountably.

How does someone, in or outside the academy, philosophize from those materials and those people? Trans communities are and have been kept out of traditional educational spaces—and certainly from the professoriate—for multiple decades and across the globe. As such, their substance lies well outside of academic texts and (highly educated) intuitions. If we are to philosophize from and in these spaces, we do and will find ourselves using words we have heard in friendship, reflections that circulate by word of mouth in trans huddles, stories we have stumbled upon in autobiography, anecdotes from clinical settings, and shared scenes of physicality (á la Stryker). Likewise, we do and will find ourselves using trans commentary on various social media sites, trans photos on Tumblr, notes on trans fashion choices, paraphernalia from trans organizing, and historical records of trans resistance. There are ideas—trans philosophical ideas—in all of these places. This is not merely "pretheoretical" fodder for the academic trans philosopher to work with. Crucially, *we do not automatically intuit appropriate methods for the (ethical) use of these materials by being either trans or a philosopher, in or outside the academy*. It is the conceit of traditional philosophy that all epistemic resources are available for untutored philosophical reflection. Trans philosophy needs to be more accountable than that. We need to learn *how* to accountably use those words, experiences, stories, anecdotes, reflections, and scenes we encounter or participate in. We need to learn *how* to accountably engage with those commentaries, photos, clothes, paraphernalia, records, and shared memories. Trans philosophy requires a consciously developed suite of philosophical methods for thinking with and through trans subcultural spaces and the poesis and grounded theorizing they sustain.

As surely as we may rely on found resources passively received or encountered, we may also need or want to construct new ones. Depending on the philosophical question we are pursuing, we may need or want to speak at length with one or more gender-disruptive people, record their life stories, or take down our own field notes. We may need or want to participate in trans aesthetic production, trans activism, or trans archival work and theorize with the theorizing already happening there. As such, people doing trans philosophy may need to develop social studies skills for interpreting (or collecting) interviews, oral histories, and ethnographic materials, just as they may need to develop cultural studies skills for analyzing (or creating) art, literature, fashion, and archives. This is not to suggest that trans philosophers become academics in general, or social scientists and cultural analysts in particular, but rather to insist that trans philosophy must be meaningfully tethered to the trans social and that philosophical training does not already equip us to handle those materials and people with the care and attention, the ethics and accountability they deserve. It may in fact limit those who have it.

Many fields have put enormous effort into thinking through their own disciplinary research ethics, including their ethical relation to lay scholarship and citizen science. Philosophy is not one of them. Philosophy believes it needs no research ethics.[63] Indeed, I am not aware of a single PhD program in the US that requires or even has a course in philosophical research ethics (not, mind you, the philosophy of research ethics, but research ethics in philosophy). Trans philosophy needs to be different in this respect. Trans philosophy (and therefore trans philosophers, in and outside the academy) ought not simply to cull, take, hew, distill, and extract. In no way am I proposing further extractivism. Trans philosophy needs to be accountable to trans communities by being grounded in trans sociality, utilizing best practices for engaging with the epistemic materials and resources there, and thinking collectively and collaboratively in such a way that the people and elements of the trans social craft as much as speak back to, at, and against trans philosophy. The potential for critique precisely from the constituents of trans subcultures is a necessary condition of accountable trans theorizing.

My book *How We Make Each Other* is informed by more than one hundred interviews, alongside archives and ethnographic field notes. One interview, in particular, haunts me most. Jason, by his own description a white queer trans man with experience of mental illness, told me, with evident frustration, "I understand the purposes of theory in a lot of ways, but I also think that sometimes it's used in a way that cuts off people who it's affecting."[64] Whatever trans philosophy, as a form of theory, is to become, it needs to maintain a constant willingness to reevaluate both the dominant methods and frameworks it may be unintentionally replicating and the trans people it may be forgetting, alienating, or simply ignoring because they muddy the argument. While trans philosophy can certainly turn to trans theory more broadly and to other philosophical and theoretical subfields dedicated to illuminating marginalized lives, including those aforementioned, for some models of accountable theorizing, it can also turn to trans histories and presents where the paths of wisdom, kindness, and courage are being, and have already been, sought out.

The kind of trans philosophy I am describing needs to work transversally between philosophy and its others,[65] between inside and outside the academy, between trans and non-trans gender-disruptive experiences, between the word "trans" and its especially decolonial critics. It is essentially a sideways project.[66] More than this, it must be humbly committed to trans locality in ways that honor the local

and dishonor professional philosophy when necessary. It must be able to negotiate trans opacity and not insist on transparency. It must remain grounded in affect. It must leave room for embarrassment and exile—precisely because the philosophical project is undertaken collaboratively and accountably. With these commitments, we have a chance of cultivating a future of trans philosophy that is capacious enough to account for, if not also contribute to, the bigness of trans and non-trans gender-disruptive stories, struggles, and hopes.

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Perhaps, as we take up hammer and chisel, we are carving out not one future of trans philosophy, after all, but several. Many of us are at work on various figures that will become something called trans philosophy. In that pluralist context, the future or futures I hope to be a part of are ones in which trans philosophy is more than a field dedicated to academic philosophizing about trans issues, or academic philosophizing done by trans people, or even academic philosophizing about trans issues done by trans people. It will also be more than philosophizing done by predominantly trans academic philosophers who are a part of specific trans subcultures and participate in their discursive and nondiscursive practices. The future of trans philosophy I hope to help define and mobilize (like so many dreams come to life) is a philosophizing led by trans and non-trans gender-disruptive people, among other gender deviants and gender drifters, who are not only active members of local sexgender subcultures but who also *theorize collaboratively and accountably with the wide range of people and materials that sustain those subcultures*.[67] Such a trans philosophy will continue to redden necks, and its academic practitioners will choose, at points, to do philosophical work at the outskirts if not outside of the confines of professional "philosophy." Crucially, they won't be the first ones there.

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NOTES

1. Zurn, "Waste Culture and Isolation."
2. Zurn, "Trans Experience in Philosophy."
3. The phrase *trans philosophy*, again as currently understood and deployed in the US, should also be traced further back to the graduate student organizers of that conference. Previously, the phrase *transgender philosophy* appeared as the title of a course taught by Amy Marvin, one of the organizers, in fall 2015 at the University of Oregon. The phrase *trans philosophy* first appeared in the conference email address (transphilosophy@gmail.com), also released in fall 2015. While the phrase did not appear on the conference program, it did appear in the conference report that Megan Burke submitted for the *Hypatia* Diversity Grant in Summer 2016. Finally, it appeared in *Hypatia*'s own report of that funding year (https://hypatiaphilosophy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Hypatia-Annual-Report-2015-final.pdf). It should be noted that, while University of Oregon philosophy professor Alejandro Valega is listed as the applicant and recipient of the Hypatia Diversity Grant, the grant application was drafted by Burke (with input from Fulden Ibrahimhakkioglu) and the conference was organized by Burke, Ibrahimhakkioglu, and Marvin, all graduate students.
4. Zurn, "Trans Philosophy"; Zurn et al., *Trans Philosophy*; Zurn, *How We Make Each Other*.
5. Zurn and Pitts, "Trans Philosophy"; Zurn, "The Path of Friction."
6. Cf. Cvetkovich, *Depression*.
7. Hale, "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing About Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans___."
8. Hale, "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing About Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans___."
9. Hale, "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing About Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans___."
10. Namaste, "Undoing Theory." I take exception to Namaste's misuse of Indigenous theory and practice in this piece.
11. Stryker, "(De)Subjugated Knowledges."
12. Radi, "On Trans* Epistemology."
13. Perry Zurn, Personal interview with Megan Burke (January 10, 2024).
14. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?"
15. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 657.
16. Cf. Bettcher, "How I Became a Trans Philosopher."
17. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 644.
18. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 657.
19. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 664.
20. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 159. Cf. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*.
21. I take calls to universal pronouns in this spirit.
22. Dembroff, "Cisgender Commonsense and Philosophy's Transgender Trouble."
23. Dembroff, "Cisgender Commonsense and Philosophy's Transgender Trouble," 404.
24. Burke, "Cis Sense and the Habit of Gender Assignment."
25. Burke, "Cis Sense and the Habit of Gender Assignment," 214. One would expect a citation here to Julia Serano's "cissexual assumption" and gender assignment, but it does not appear. See Serano, *Whipping Girl*.
26. Burke, "Cis Sense and the Habit of Gender Assignment," 215.
27. Burke, "Cis Sense and the Habit of Gender Assignment," 215.
28. The ease—or better yet, surety—with which cis sense infiltrates trans people goes unacknowledged.
29. Richardson-Self, "Becoming Cisgender."
30. Richardson-Self, "Becoming Cisgender," 613.
31. Richardson-Self, "Becoming Cisgender," 615.
32. Richardson-Self, "Becoming Cisgender," 618.
33. Richardson-Self, "Becoming Cisgender," 620.
34. Richardson-Self, "Becoming Cisgender," 619.
35. Manne, "Trans Philosophy Matters."
36. Manne, "Trans Philosophy Matters."
37. Manne, "Trans Philosophy Matters."
38. Zurn, "Trans Experience in Philosophy."
39. Zurn, "Puzzle Pieces." Cf. a revised version in Zurn, *Curiosity and Power*, 173–97.
40. See Harris-Aultmann, *The Trans Ordinary*.
41. Zurn, "The Path of Friction," 74.
42. Personal correspondence (April 21, 2022).
43. Stryker, "Dungeon Intimacies."
44. Stryker, "Dungeon Intimacies," 39.
45. Stryker, "Dungeon Intimacies," 43–44.

46. Stryker, "Dungeon Intimacies," 43. This poesis is worth interpreting in conjunction with Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons* and Hazard, *Underflows*.
47. Radi, "On Trans* Epistemology," 56.
48. Chik, "Butler en Cisminario Queer en Brasil."
49. Athayde, "I Seminário Queer e os saberes subalternos."
50. Miskolsci, "O que é o Queer?"
51. Athayde, "I Seminário Queer e os saberes subalternos."
52. Radi, "Economia del privilegio."
53. Hale himself is familiar with both, having found in sex radical, trans, ftm, BDSM, and leather communities greater capacities for meaning making than professional philosophy offers.
54. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things*.
55. Maduro, "An(other) Invitation to Epistemological Humility."
56. I use the term "non-trans gender disruptive people" to expressly contradict the assumptions a) that non-trans people are necessarily cis and b) that all gender disruptive people are trans, two assumptions that deny numerous personal testimonies, intersex experiences, and cultural differences.
57. See Borges, "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," 101–04; Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xv.
58. Many thanks to Amy Marvin for this question.
59. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 11.
60. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 12.
61. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 13. See also Bettcher's development of these ideas in *Beyond Personhood*.
62. Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" 12. I use the parenthetical (trans) here to mark that while Bettcher privileges the trans philosopher doing trans philosophy, she certainly leaves room for non-trans philosophers doing trans philosophy.
63. For a related argument, see Basu, "Risky Inquiry."
64. Perry Zurn, Personal interview with Jason (October 4–5, 2017).
65. Butler, "Can the Other of Philosophy Speak?"
66. Here I build on DiPietro's *Sideways Selves*.
67. I use the term *sexgender*, instead of sex and gender, to resist the common notions that sex is biological and gender is social, and that body and mind can be meaningfully separated.

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