



Editorial – Trans materialities

Max van Midde, Ludovico Vick Virtù,
and Olga Cielemecka

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This collection of essays puts on the agenda the multiple constellations and meanings of trans materiality. Trans materiality as an umbrella term refers to the material reality created by the oppressive structures built into the medical, psychiatric, legal and scientific regimes that control trans bodies; the binary normative system of sex/gender; as well as their intersections with racism and history of colonialism that produce violence. However, trans materialities are also defined and composed of the lived experiences and embodied knowledges of trans folks, in trans communities, social movements and organising, and through production of culture, language, art, and affective work of care and resistance (see, e.g., Raha 2017).

Trans materialities should not be understood as a neat and concise concept. It is a fluid, hybrid, and diffractive term that is shaped and reshaped by authors featured in this special issue. With this issue we convey a special interest in envisioning trans materialities as intra-actions, to use Karen Barad's (2007) concept indicating radical relationality and interdependency, between trans bodies and subjectivities, material reality, and theorizations of matter.

The authors of essays included in this special issue write and re-write trans materiality with auto-ethnography, new materialisms, posthumanisms, experiential and creative techniques, while engaging the legacy of trans studies scholarship, along with feminist and queer interventions and Indigenous critique. The authors not only employ their academic expertise and research skills, but also draw on experience and knowledge often devalued in academic publishing and academia at large: on their activism, personal, embodied experience, community wisdom, and bring these perspectives together. In so doing they challenge the of-



ten rigid and exclusionary limits of academic legitimacy that tend to diminish the role of knowledge (especially trans knowledge) produced outside of it.

In composing this collection we were invested in epistemological, ethical and political questions of knowledge production and power and we adopted two main criteria to guide our work. Firstly, we aimed at a trans-led perspective that would underscore the theorizing fostered by trans scholars. We take seriously objections expressed by scholars such as Viviane Namaste (2009), Jay Prosser (1998), and Sade Kondelin (2014) towards research that uses trans bodies instrumentally, as metaphors or tools to formulate theories on gender and sexuality, and as a result, appropriates the narrative around trans bodies and operationalizes the lived reality of trans people. For our authors, trans is not a decontextualized tool nor an abstraction, but a personal, communal, analytical, reflexive, and often political praxis (see, e.g., van der Drift, 2018). Secondly, we wanted this issue to do ever developing intersectional work, showing how trans materiality is shaped by and at the same time shapes other interconnected dimensions of lived experiences such as class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and Indigeneity, among others.

We open this collection with the article “Revisiting the *wildcat strike in the gender factory*: Material effects of classification” by j. vreeer verkerke. verkerke, who is a trans rights activist and organizer, takes up a central theme of this special issue of materiality by exposing the material, lived effects of a legal-medical conundrum in which trans people find themselves caught. This essay gives our readers a concise introduction to the history of defining the transgender body, specifically by looking at psychiatric classifications that aim to capture and delineate it. Against these classifications – that aim at fixing the subject to stabilize its gender identity within a binary sex/gender system, and at “fixing” or “healing” it – verkerke unmasks not only the violence inherent to these classifications but also their historicity and contingency. While today’s legal gender recognition, verkerke explains, all too often depends on mental health diagnosis, such medical-legal entanglement becomes something that trans individuals have to navigate on a daily basis. Trans individuals are not, however, “docile subjects” (Foucault, 1977; Pearce et al., 2018) merely co-produced and subjugated by this system; rather, while being affected by it, they also interpret, resist, and organize against it. Therefore the focus is rather on the affirmative aspect – on the struggle against pathologization and medicalization of trans experience. Resisting the medical-psychiatric power, trans emerges

as a movement against the fixing/fixating of trans bodies and lives. In an analogy to what Susan Stryker writes about transitioning as “a movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting point – rather than any particular destination or mode of transition” (Stryker, 2008, p. 1), here as well trans is a movement of opening possibilities away from an imposed dichotomy of the Western sex/gender system. Or, to use a metaphor that Verkerke reclaims, trans is a mode of resistance capable of stalling the “gender factory” that produces “fixed” gendered subjectivities and bodies.

Next, in their respective contributions, Jacob Lau and Julius Thissen open questions around transitioning and transmasculinity. While Lau offers an intimate, auto-ethnographic account of how his mixed-race body is decoded during his transitioning process, Thissen’s photography series investigates hypermasculine contexts such as a gym, a boxing club, or a car repair shop. Both contributions, albeit in very different ways, direct the reader toward rethinking trans experiences of gender through complex and contextualized inter-dimensional lenses. While Thissen’s pictures aesthetically hint at whiteness as one of the markers that plays a role in how (trans)gendered bodies are being read and valued; in Lau’s essay “Transition as decreation” race plays a major role in understanding how bodies are socially constructed. A racialized and gendered body that is “hard-to-read” for others here opposes a white cis-gaze by its ability of “seeing slantwise” (Ahmed, 2006). Distracting and disturbing cisnormativity (an assumption that cis-bodies are the norm) and white optics (that invisibilizes non-white experiences and bodies; Sullivan, 2007), “seeing slantwise opens up mixed trans bodies to nonlinear ways of organizing and feeling out their embodied histories that does not adhere to cisnormative time” (Lau in this volume).

While this collection looks at various aspects of materiality of trans lives, Saoirse O’Shea’s essay explores the question of passing (and a refusal to pass) and sexuality. In a personal account, O’Shea addresses the questions of violence inflicted on trans people, a desire for intimacy, and how all too often being close with someone, sexuality or emotionally, puts trans folks at a risk of violence in a transphobic society. At the same time, refusing to pass is yet another mode of an embodied material resistance put up against a system that wants to categorize bodies as either/or: male or female, passing or not. The question of sexuality and a trans or queer body as desirable and erotic is also central for Robin Bauer’s article, “Cybercocks and Holod-

icks: Renegotiating the Boundaries of Material Embodiment in Les-bi-trans-queer BDSM.” Bauer and his interview partners examine the properties and boundaries of bodies in BDSM encounters. Entering into a dialogue with feminist techno-science and new materialisms (Haraway, Barad) this paper theorizes the body as un-settled, creative, and simultaneously re-drawn and renegotiated in a (sexual) encounter.

Next author featured in this issue, Sebastian De Line, in his engagement with Donna Haraway’s feminist theory, takes the discussions on trans materiality in yet another direction. While reading Donna Haraway’s book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kinship in the Chthulucene* (2016) from Indigenous and trans perspectives, De Line draws on Indigenous thinkers such as Leroy Little Bear, Gregory Cajete, and Winona LaDuke, among others, to point to non-Western, more sustainable and kinder ways of relating to human and nonhuman beings around us. At the same time, by thinking with Indigenous ontologies and ways of forming relationships, De Line shows how these can support a different paradigm of thinking about trans life.

One of the thematic threads that reverberates through many of this volume’s contributions are questions of knowledge production, the power over who gets to define trans bodies and lives, and resistance. While De Line shows the invisibilisation and/or appropriation of Indigenous knowledges, including in feminist theory, David Azul in an experimental fictocritical essay looks at the materiality of voice and trans speaking. Azul investigates the violence of gendering speech acts (“It’s a girl!”/“It’s a boy!”), audibility as regulated by phonetics (the science of speech sounds) and speech-language pathology, looking at the conditions of being heard. Azul asks: “How to imagine ever coming to voice if one is unable to recognize oneself in the sex category to which one has been allocated at birth and if embodying an unambiguously female or male gender is widely regarded as a necessary precondition for the adoption of a subject position and consequently any form of ‘human’ (rather than ‘non-human’ or ‘monstrous’) expression?” (Azul in this volume). Against the violence that renders trans bodies “speech-less” or inaudible, Azul experiments with other modes of speaking, also in the context of what is considered “legitimate” speaking in an academic knowledge production. In a similar vein, Eric Llaveria Caselles in “Dismantling the Transgender Brain” critically inspects the binary system projected onto brains of trans individuals in neuro-scientific research, challenging the existing – seemingly “objective” and “apolitical” – systems of knowledge production in science, and calling for holding scientists accountable.

In the last part of this volume, our contributors Joyce Gloria Floyd, and Robin McDonald and Dan Vena encourage us to imagine and think with queer creatures – those that in their crossing of the boundaries between human/nonhuman, organic/inorganic, fantastic/real, fleshed/wax challenge the binary system that categorises the body.

We, as editorial team, ourselves have been deeply transformed by the very experience of putting this issue together. We experienced it as the emergence of a material platform of inspiring trans-centered cooperations, challenging (political and often painful) decisions regarding selection of contributions, self-reflection on our different positionings, and a constant re-checking of our accountability practices (on our part). In particular, we felt empowered by the possibility to involve and prioritize trans and trans-sensitive perspectives as an integral constituent of the reviewing process itself, rather than disseminating articles with a trans topic to be assessed by objective and disembodied knowledge gatekeepers behind the scenes. We feel thankful towards the authors, artists and reviewers for their individual and collective work that made it possible to compile this issue, a work of trans knowledge, and most of all, a work of trans care. We hope that essays collected here will inspire readers to reflect on trans materiality as a work of transformation – of bodies of humans and bodies of knowledge, of discourses and practices, organizational processes and realities, in academia and beyond.

About the editors

Max Ramina van Midde is a Swedish based trans activist and independent researcher who holds a MSc in gender studies at Lund University and a BA in social work at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht. Embedded in his academic, activist and embodied position as an Indo trans man he explores transgender narratives from a postcolonial and new materialist perspective. Email: maxvanmidde@gmail.com.

Ludovico Vick Virtù is a researcher and trans activist. He is a PhD candidate in organization studies at Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands. In his current research, he puts in dialogue organization, queer and transgender, and social movement studies to explore the power dynamics of organizational processes around sexuality and gender. He recently published 'Dis/organizzare la sessualità fai da te in una prospettiva trans' in Cossutta, C., Greco V., Mainardi A and Voli S.

(Eds), *Smagliature digitali: Corpi, Generi e Tecnologie*, AgenziaX, 2018. Email: vick.virtu@gmail.com.

Olga Cielemecka is a researcher at the Unit of Gender Studies, Department of Thematic Studies, Linköping University in Sweden. With a PhD in philosophy from Warsaw University in Poland, in her research she brings together contemporary philosophy, feminist and queer theory, and environmental humanities, in an effort to rethink the concepts of the subject, community, and collaboration in the times of advanced capitalism and environmental change. Email: olga.cielemecka@gmail.com.

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