

**Mattering Beyond the Binary:
A Baradian Posthumanist Intervention
to the Western Conceptualisation
of Normative Transgender Embodiment**

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Abstract

This thesis is a theoretical analysis which seeks to map existing critiques in queer and trans scholarship on gender embodiment and offer a novel conceptual intervention. More specifically, it focuses critique on the logic systems underlying the Western conceptualisation of trans embodiment and the production of the transnormative subject in the contemporary United States - phallogocentrism, representationalism, and humanism - and provides a theoretical alternative based in Baradian posthumanist philosophy.

This thesis analyses the way in which mainstream American society conceptually approaches nonnormative gender and sexuality as it exists outside the contexts of heteronormative Western identity politics, specifically critiquing the phallogocentric logic underlying normativity, evident during the LGBT rights movements of the 1980s and 1990s. The social imposition of the heteronormative gender binary is questioned without taking away the agency and validity of the individuals who uphold it. Rather, it puts the focus on the contemporary discourses (legal, medical, and social) that dictate the material conditions of the body that permit inclusion within Western society, particularly American citizenship. Furthermore, it critiques the Western habit of rejecting nature and biology while relying on sociolinguistic structures as an indication of reality.

Inviting biology back into the conversation of the trans experience without falling into bioessentialism, Baradian posthumanism gives nature back her agency and reminds us that nature is not fixed, but rather is in an ongoing process of becoming. In doing so, posthumanism offers an ontological shift from linguistic representations to discursive practices by calling for a witness to nature's performativity. Through this reconceptualisation, transgender embodiment can be understood as natural variance rather than social deviance.

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Introduction

The Western world utilises strict bigenderism; that is, there are two genders with corresponding sexes: man/male and woman/female. The need to classify within these terms is overwhelming. "In order to become intelligible as a person, one must perform within the well-known and well-established rules of gender" (Gilbert 2009, 94). These rules, recognised in both popular and official context, cover everything we do and say and in such a way as to not seem coercive. All social interactions are predicated on these categories and are applied in a social context that stigmatises 'imperfect' men and women who do not meet the ideals. The assumed naturalness of the bigender system makes those who violate it understood as 'unnatural' and worthy of condemnation. Institutional arrangements that uphold the bigender system are seen as following natural order, and its flexibility to include differences are seen as 'accommodation'. Bureaucratic devices utilise bigenderism for basic classification on legal documents. In order to be recognised as a citizen of the Western world, particularly in the United States, it has been a long standing fact that one must properly identify within the bigender system: that one's genitals correspond to their gender appearance. While this bigender system is indeed desirable for many people, it is not the desire for all.

As such, it is arguably inhumane to impose the gender binary onto everyone, especially in the violent way that it is required in Western society for trans people to gain certain legal rights/ recognition, medical treatments/access, and social acceptance/legibility, such that they must physically alter their bodies in order to meet social terms and expectations. The socially-invalidated embodiments of transgender individuals are expected to assimilate to the pre-existing gender expectations and heteronormative values of the Western society to which they belong in order to participate. Specifically, trans folks are required to physically adhere to normative gender binary embodiments and undergo various medically-sanctioned steps with the 'goal' of 'passing' as the 'opposite sex', a process called 'transitioning', to mark their successful completion of assimilation to society. Otherwise, their 'conscious noncompliance' to the normative is perceived as inferior, incapacitated, and unnatural. Through the pathologization of the nonnormative, 'health' has become a marker of successful normativity (Berlant through Puar in "The Right to Maim", 13). Neoliberal American society does not readily accommodate, let alone accept, that which deviates from its dominant, normative ideologies of 'proper', 'natural' gender embodiment. As such, the successfully-normative transgender subject is produced and made the exemplar for acceptable trans existence and citizenship based on their desire and ability to 'pass'.

It is true that assimilating into this bigender arrangement is desired by many trans folks; a recent study suggests that while one third of trans adults and over half of trans youth identify as genderqueer nonbinary (GQNB), the rest identify as gender conforming (Tatum et al. 2020, 1). As much as gender norms are indeed limited sociolinguistic constructs regulated through legal, medical, and social institutions, humans are not passive agents upon which these constructs are

imposed. People have agency, and they choose to perform gender whether it be through repetition, appropriation, reinterpretation, etc. Judith Butler has made it clear that humans are in a dialectical relationship with the categories in which they are defined. In her work titled *Gender Trouble*, Butler's main argument is that gender is a performance, a learned behaviour, imposed on us by heteronormative society, that gets reworked over time through human reenactment/reinterpretation (1990). Through this dynamic interaction, words shift in meaning as do human interpretations of the words. Such concepts as 'man', 'woman', and what is considered 'normal' have not been fixed but have adjusted over time. Thus it is unfair and untrue to say that gender is fixed and forced on us. That being said, bigenderism is a heavily enforced normative construct that has shaped not only the face of the earth but also the way in which we interact with it. It affects how we think, talk, and behave. It teaches us what to do, and how not to do it under a false pretence of what is 'natural'. In analysing and critiquing this Western notion of what is natural, multiple theories are drawn from across the chapters of this thesis.

To begin the theoretical analysis is a discussion about the normative subjectivities of Western society in Chapter 1. Based upon the writing and work of professor and diversity and inclusion specialist, Dr. Jojanneke Van der Toorn, I present the dominant normative subject against which all citizens of Western society are measured and valued: the heteronormative subject (Van der Toorn, et al., 2020). Van der Toorn differentiates between descriptive and prescriptive heteronormativity, naming the latter as the issue, as this normative subject sets the standard for how a proper, capacitated citizen *should* identify and behave according to their sex characteristics: as cisgender and heterosexual.

To illuminate the underlying logic system that justifies the understanding of heteronormativity as the natural and proper way of being, I turn to the critical work of Rosi Braidotti in her piece called *Sexual Difference Theory* (2000). A feminist poststructural theorist as well as a self-proclaimed "posthuman human", Braidotti names "phallogocentrism" as the particular and perverse centuries-old humanist logic that has maintained our patriarchal vision of the world. This creative term will be dissected and defined accordingly. Through its inherent valuing of language over experience, or "word over world" (Barad 2003, 806), phallogocentric logic negates any differing experiential narrative as illegitimate deviation. Furthermore, it devalues that which differs from the masculine as the 'pejorative Other', creating a negative instance of difference which lends to binary habits of thought (Braidotti 2000, 299-301). This understanding of difference as a negative still plagues mainstream Western minds today, as it is deployed in the face of the nonnormative, as was done with homosexuality not long ago.

The history of homosexuality in the United States provides a narrative of how the socially condemned nonnormative can become acceptable into mainstream society by assimilating to normative values. I reference Lisa Duggan's notion of homonormativity, with the aid of Susan Stryker, to showcase the way in which normative regulation is masqueraded as progressive inclusion. Duggan's definition of homonormativity speaks to how homosexuals are following the

neoliberal agenda and mimicking heteronormative culture and by doing so, reap the benefits of what is perceived as 'normalcy' (2003). Stryker's understanding of homonormativity is "an attempt to articulate the double sense of marginalisation and displacement experienced within transgender political and cultural activism" by calling to light "the ways that homosexuality, as a sexual orientation category based on constructions of gender it shared with the dominant culture, sometimes had more in common with the straight world than it did with [the transgender world]" (2008, 145-146). That is to say, cisgendered homosexuals in their fight for rights and equality the 1990s abandoned their trans siblings on the grounds that their subversive gender was 'too much' for mainstream society to look beyond. The whole of this chapter is to show that normativity is not only a sociolinguistic construct, but also a strategic performance for citizenship and survival in a society that perceives difference as negative social deviance.

From these cisgendered-normative subjects, the foundation will be laid upon which to present the concept of transnormativity in Chapter 2. Utilising the work of major trans theorists Jasbir Puar and Susan Stryker, I explain the set of social, medical, and legal regulations that produce the transnormative subject. I then delineate three key assumptions of the transnormative narrative: an individual's feeling of distress over the 'incongruence' between their mind and body, the desire for a 'complete' and linear transition, and the end goal being the ability to 'pass' as cisgender. I illustrate that these assumptions are problematic as they do not align with the experiences and desires of all trans folks - only some. Yet, in order to be legible within the United States and be recognised as a capacitated citizen, trans folk have to meet the legally and medically sanctioned requirements that reflect the traditional transnormative narrative. After elucidating the factors that promote transnormativity, terms that exist in a more broad understanding of transness get defined. In order to showcase the natural diversity of trans experiences, I will define three key aspects of gender: identity, expression, and embodiment. Through understanding these areas of variance, it is made clear that there are exponential ways in which gender can naturally manifest, and be experienced, beyond the normative binary.

The ethos of this thesis comes to full bloom in Chapter 3 through the presentation of Baradian posthumanism as a much needed intervention to contemporary Western approaches of conceptualising 'natural' human/gender embodiment. In direct sentiment of Barad, we have had a "brute reversal" of our naturalist beliefs under certain material conditions of Western society (2003, 801). These material conditions have naturalised the belief that being born with particular anatomy is the seat of one's gender. This bio-essentialist argument has been critiqued by feminist, trans, and queer theorists which has made discussing biology as a factor in the conversation for transness a sensitive topic to breach. Barad offers a novel approach to tackling the divide between language/culture and biology/nature to allow for critical theorisation of trans embodiment/subjectivity without thinking of gender embodiment as either linguistic representation or biologically essential. The posthumanist intervention offers a way to look at the fact of our biological situation in a dynamic way.

First, I reiterate critiques of representationalism as shared by Barad to establish the understanding that “language has been granted too much power” in dictating the truths of our world (2003, 801). As an alternative to this humanist reliance on linguistic representations, Barad offers her posthumanist agential realist ontology with its focus on discursive practices, particularly the practices of nature. From this new ontology, two essential elements are discussed which aid in understanding the posthumanist intervention: nature’s agency and nature’s performativity. By shifting focus from language to actions, Barad calls for a recognition of nature’s active role in the ‘becoming’ of the world that takes into account “the fullness of matter’s implication in its ongoing historicity” (2003, 810). In (re)presenting these matters of fact, or these facts of matter, Baradian posthumanism reminds us that nature is not just passively receptive to human/cultural understandings but instead, is fully capable of shaping/bending established ‘truths’. In the case of transgender embodiment, specifically in regards to what should be considered ‘natural’ gender embodiment, the persistent manifestation of men born into women’s bodies and women born into men’s bodies must be recognised as nature’s performativity. In other words, transness that desires nonnormative gender embodiment should be recognised as natural variance.

The posthuman notion of performativity calls into question the givenness of differential categories, examining practices through which these boundaries are stabilised/destabilised (Barad 2003, 807). In the case of transgender embodiment, the social, legal, and medical discourse that determines normative boundaries of the body for ‘men’ and ‘women’ need to be examined and reworked. There is an ironic appeal to nature that is being made through enforcing ‘corrective’ treatments on ‘unnatural’ transgender bodies in order for them to fit sociolinguistic constructs for proper gender embodiment. Instead of understanding nonnormative transgender embodiment (women with male anatomy and men with female anatomy) as deviance in need of correction, they should be understood as natural diversity that should be respected per the individual’s desires. Indeed, Baradian posthumanism makes room for all nonnormative human bodies to be reconceptualized as natural diversity for which our understanding of certain linguistic tools must be adjusted, rather than as problematic, and pathological, deviance.

Chapter I

Normative Subjectivities

The normative subjectivities of Western society are meant to inform 'normal', 'proper', and thus expected manifestations of human embodiment for citizenship in the United States based upon what is considered to be central aspects of 'self': sex characteristics, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. This chapter presents two major normative subjectivities: the heteronormative and the homonormative. In between their respective illustrations is an analyses of the justification of a "normative subject", illuminating the particular logic that upholds the binary of what is right/natural and wrong/unnatural, and the perspective from which this 'knowledge' came.

Heteronormativity

The original and dominant normative ideology upon which all individuals in Western society are regulated is heteronormativity: the pervasive, socially ingrained belief that humans are naturally male or female, with associated roles for their gender that match their biological sex characteristics, and that they are inherently heterosexual. This norm is held up by the Western sociolinguistic construct of the gender/sex binary which states that one's biological sex, legible through primary sex characteristics, determines their gender, such that one can be male/man or female/woman; these categories are mutually exclusive (Van der Toorn, et al., 2020; Drescher, 2015). This ideology of exemplary citizenship has been socially (re)produced through Western social, legal, and medical discourses for centuries. This heteronormative expectation is the greatest organising principle of society in the United States.

As Van der Toorn suggests, the issue is not with descriptive heteronormativity, which merely describes the dominant, taken-for-granted nature of social structures. Indeed, it is about more than just assuming that everyone is heterosexual and cisgendered due to the fact that it characterises the majority of the population. Rather, the problem is with prescriptive heteronormativity which dictates that because the majority of the population is heterosexual and cisgendered, it is the way human embodiment should be (Van der Toorn, et al., 2020). Attention must be paid to the origins of this normative subjectivity and how it has been socially reproduced over centuries, fabricating evidence for its supposed 'natural' majority.

According to poststructuralist theory, in order to understand a social phenomenon, you must learn about the system of knowledge that produced it. In the case of 'heteronormativity', we must recognise the relation between power, discourse, and the creation of subjectivity as it pertains to the implementation of the gender/sex binary. That is, we must recognise that under patriarchal Europe, in its nascent stages of capitalism, men and women were organised into gender roles in a way that changed the social dynamic from one of complementary balance to one of hierarchical superiority/inferiority (Firestone, S., 1971; Hartmann, H., 1979; Arruzza, C., 2016). This ideology became enforced worldwide with the global colonial mission of Europe, lending to the current hegemonic nature of this binary gender concept.

Short of writing a genealogy of gender, I want to reiterate poststructuralist critiques of the phallogocentric logic upon which this and all dualisms of Western thought rely (Braidotti 2000,

298). Relocating the origins of the gender/sex binary as a discursive tool of social control by early capitalist patriarchal European society, rather than in true biological fact, is of importance, not just to denunciate the false universalism of feminine inferiority to the masculine, but to also illuminate the basis behind the Western notion of 'difference' as a negative. The gender binary begs the question of representational accuracy - the same question of accuracy asked of scientific 'knowledge': is this understanding an accurate representation of how things really are (nature) or is this the product of social activity (culture) (Barad 2003, 806). In other words, is our understanding of gender as a binary the natural order, or is it the product of social regulation, grounded in socioeconomics rather than biology? Critiques of representationalism will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Phallogocentrism of Western Understanding

Poststructuralists recognise that what has been passed off as objective, essential, authentic information is actually a subjective understanding based upon the perspective of the 'knower', or the creator of knowledge. In other words, ideology is an imaginary of those in power. Feminist poststructuralists understand ideology, then, to be patriarchal representations of gender (Braidotti, 298). It is no secret that men have historically held all positions of power and knowledge production in the West. This has allowed them to not only govern people, in and outside of European borders, but to also create the ideological constructs with which people are understood and regulated. As a result, the way that modern Western society understands its reality is through patriarchal representations and understandings (Braidotti, 299). These understandings, ideologies, and subjectivities are grounded in a particular type of problematic logic that nonetheless still structures Western understandings of reality: phallogocentrism.

Coined by philosopher Jacques Derrida as "the system of metaphysical oppositions predominant in Western philosophy" (Addicott), 'phallogocentrism' is the combination of the two terms 'phallocentrism' and 'logocentrism'. Phallocentrism is the ideology of the phallus being the central organizing factor of the world, privileging the masculine as rational and normative while simultaneously positing the feminine as the 'lacking' (specifically lacking a phallus) and therefore devalued 'Other'. 'Logocentrism' regards words and language as fundamental and irreducible expressions of reality that trumps any differing experiential narrative (Stone, 1987). Thus together, 'phallogocentrism' privileges the masculine perspective in the creation of meaning such that what differs from this supposed normative understanding is devalued and believed to be inferior (Braidotti, 2000, p299-301). As such, this logic is incontestable and self-sustaining.

The political implications of this logic is that it is not only always operational, but that no "uncontaminated authentic voice of otherness" exists (Braidotti 2000, 301). The 'Other' has always been understood in the terms of the dominant. This is what has led to the understanding of difference as inferior because those who differed were always dominated. Feminist poststructuralist have addressed this negative instance of difference as it relates to the construct of gender/sex as an oppositional binary. Specifically, sexual difference theorists have

critiqued the dissymmetrical power relations between European men and women that have led to the feminine being posited as the devalued 'Other' (Braidotti, 299). These are the same dissymmetrical power relations between European men and the rest of global humanity that lent to the understanding of the domination and colonisation of these 'different' foreign societies as evidence to their inferiority (Braidotti, 298). Interestingly, it has been argued that the primacy of men's dominance over women is the cornerstone on which all other oppression rests in the West (Hartmann, 1979; Rich, 1984).

Nonnormative as Inferior

This negative instance of difference, which creates the pejorative 'Other', is key to phallogocentrism and is embedded into the language of Western society. It underlies the dualisms and oppositional binaries that make up the Western understanding: male/female, right/wrong, self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, civilised/primitive (Addicott). A phallogocentric system, as is Western society, functions and sustains itself by creating sets of pejorative 'Others' to its dominant norm such that what results is the understanding that difference from the norm is inferior. This devalued 'Otherness' organises differences in a hierarchical scale. The hierarchy of difference is no accident; it is necessary to the phallogocentric system of meaning and the social order that sustains it (Braidotti, 300). This divisive logic has been key to practices of domination and 'inferiorization' of the 'Other' (Addicott). The historical domination of humans along the lines of difference has fed the understanding of 'difference' being a natural inferiority, "which then made entire categories of beings into devalued and therefore disposable entities" (Braidotti, 299). Negative instance of difference becomes grounds for condemnation, allowing for 'governability' of deviance/deviants (Braidotti, 300).

Centuries of socialisation through this phallogocentric system has led to an internalisation and naturalisation of this hierarchical organisation of relational superiority/inferiority of difference between and among individuals in Western society (Braidotti, 299-300). People have learned to see the world through this androcentric symbolic structure, such that they internalise this oppositional binary logic and their place within it. Nonnormative individuals are taught to perceive the dominant, normative system to be working properly and that instead *they* are the problem that needs rectification. Thus, (hetero)normative social pressure affects individuals in such a way that they are insidiously influenced to help maintain and reinforce heteronormative ideology, an ideology that best serves to reproduce and maintain the socioeconomic system. This is how heteronormativity regulates deviations such that they become an extension/reinforcement of the normative ideology.

Homonormativity

Homonormativity is an extension of heteronormative ideology to include the most normative of the nonheteronormative: cisgendered homosexuals. The understanding popularised by Lisa Duggan in her work titled *Twilight of Equality*, "homonormativity is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormativity assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the

possibility of a demobilised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (2003). In other words, it is the assimilation, rather than resistance, of gender-normative LGB individuals to heteronormative neoliberal ideals and constructs in such a way as to spare them of condemnation at the expense of the nonnormative Others - namely, the trans community. ‘Trans’ terminology will be defined in the following chapter.

This assimilation of the cis-LGB community is not necessarily done because they do not believe their nonnormative ideals and constructs to be legitimate and valid, but because Western heteronormative society will not make a place for them. Instead, social pressure and stigmatisation act as gatekeepers to the nonnormative becoming accepted into mainstream society. If one does not conform to the norm, they are considered subversive, incapacitated deviants who either need to be corrected or they are excluded from full participation in society. Nonnormativity is not an option. Therefore, in order to be perceived as a ‘productive’ and capacitated member of society, and thus attain certain privileges (inclusion), rewards (rights), and benefits (safety/security), cisgender individuals of the LGB community assume dominant heteronormative ideals to demonstrate their capability as a functioning member of society, such as having a monogamous marriage and raising children (Puar, J. K., 2017a). This self-correcting response to social pressures feeds the assumption that “queer people *want* [emphasis added] to be a part of the dominant, mainstream, heterosexual culture,” (Karcere, L., 2015). Homonormativity feeds the illusion of a dominant hetero-normativity.

Homonormativity is about more than individual participation in heterosexual norms. It also involves the policing of nonnormative sexuality and gender expressions from within the LGBTQIA+ community through the privileging and supporting of heterosexual ideals as the proper ‘norm’ (Napier et al., 2020). Originating from within the trans community of the 1990s, ‘homonormativity’ was meant to call-out the way in which gays and lesbians in the United States were being exclusionary of their gender-queer trans siblings in the fight for rights, securing privileges for themselves based on their “adherence to dominant culture constructions of gender” (Stryker, S., 2008). Homonormativity only works to privilege those who are “most assimilated, gender-appropriate, politically mainstream,” - the cisgender, gender-normative, white, middle class, gay-identifying person - and disregard those nonnormative members of the LGBTQIA+ community - the trans community (Puar, J. K., Ochieng’, N. T. A., 2017; Karcere, L., 2015). Only the gender-normative in expression and identification are deemed “most worthy and deserving of visibility and rights,” by the state and get included in the equality rhetoric (Duggan, L., 2003).

Certain exceptions to the norm have been welcomed as acceptable alternatives. Yet, as these new normative subjects gained rights and inclusion by assimilating to pre-existing normative expectations, non-compliant embodiments are simultaneously excluded. Under the guise of progressive inclusive sociopolitics, humans were still being excluded. This is a prime example of how we often do not notice the reinforcement of the heteronormative status quo masquerading as

inclusion and tolerance of 'diversity'," (Puar, J. K., & Ochieng', N. T. A., 2017). Queerness has become socially palatable as long as those queer individuals adhere to the socially prescribed gender expressions and related social roles, and do not break expected gender-norms (Cramwinckel, F. M., et al., 2018).

The policing of sexual and gender expressions within the LGBTQIA+ community have adjusted to be more 'inclusive' as queer experiences and rights become more widely accepted in mainstream society. Instead of only policing normalcy along the lines of sexual orientation, the "terms of degeneracy" have shifted in the most recent decade, bringing us to the location of the transnormative subject (Puar, J. K., 2017). Like homonormativity for homosexuals, transnormativity is the socially expected way for transgender people to exist, particularly as citizens of the United States, by assimilating to heteronormative gender expectations. However, unlike homonormativity, demands for transnormative assimilation involve medical intervention to physically alter the body to fit socially expected embodiments for one's gender. The transnormative, as well as other trans variations and their terms, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter II

Trans Embodiments: The Transnormative and Trans-Variants

Just as the homonormative subject functions as an exemplar for cisgendered LGBs, the transnormative narrative exemplifies the proper way to participate in Western society for trans-identifying individuals - a way that upholds and reinforces dominant heteronormative values under the guise of 'progress', 'acceptance', and 'inclusion'. As with the homonormative subject, the transnormative subject has become state-sanctioned through their assimilation to heteronormative gender binary expectations. However, unlike the homonormative, the transnormative requires medically interfering with the physical body in order for the trans individual to be legible within Western society's standards and expectations for a healthy, proper, capacitated citizen/human.

With the foundation laid in the previous chapter regarding the logic that underlies the Western normative subjectivities, this chapter discusses the contemporary social, legal, and medical discourses that produce the transnormative subject in the United States. Three key assumptions found in the transnormative narrative, mistaken to be universal among all trans folks, get outlined: initial distress or 'gender dysphoria', desire for a 'full' transition to treat this distress, with the final goal of 'passing' as the 'opposite' gender. These assumptions are worth discussing, as they seem to cater more to Western social norms than to the reality and desires of the individuals to which they apply, yet they are the essential markers of normative assimilation granting legal rights and recognition in the United States. After discussing the limited legal allowance for gender variance, I present the understanding of transness from outside of the context of mainstream America, showcasing the natural diversity found among the trans community. In particular, three aspects of gender are fleshed-out: identity, expression, and embodiment. This suggests the various chances/opportunities from which gender nonnormativity manifests and as such, the myriad of possible desires for one's gender. By doing so, the indication should be clear that there is a need for an official allowance of gender variance beyond the state sanctioned gender binary, rather than a restriction of variance due to established sociolinguistic structures of Western understanding.

Transnormativity

The transnormative narrative is one of singular and linear transition, from the gender assigned at birth to the 'opposite' gender. The transnormative subject is understood to have an internal feeling of distress over the 'incongruence' between their gender identity and their gender embodiment, as outlined in the DSM-V. This distress causes them to seek help from a medical professional who can assess them against the diagnostic criteria outlined in the DSM-V for the condition now called 'Gender Dysphoria'. If the criteria are met to the satisfaction/understanding of the medical professional, the transnormative subject is given access to 'gender affirming' medical treatments, an entire process known as transitioning, in order to 'align' the body (embodiment) with the mind (identity) according to normative social expectations for gender. Transitioning involves specific, medically sanctioned steps from hormone replacement therapy (HRT), to 'top surgery', to sex reassignment surgery (SRS) (Davy 2015). At the 'end' of the transition process, the transnormative subject is expected to 'fully' and 'completely' embody their target gender in such a way that they can 'pass' as a cisgendered person. This is lauded as the ultimate goal and the mark of successful transition. Through the completion of this transitioning process, the transnormative subject gains

access/ability to amend their legal documents to reflect their affirmed gender, which in turn gives them easier access to rights such as voting, education, housing, employment, etc. This exemplary transgender subject of normativity is co-opted by the state and transformed into a linear narrative instructing assimilation. This exemplar is the one against which all trans folks get compared/judged/validated socially, legally, and medically in the United States.

The problem is not with transnormativity as a descriptive of the gender-conforming transgender narrative, desired by roughly half of all trans-identifying individuals (Tatum et al., 2020). Rather, it is with the prescriptive nature of this narrative, which leads to the belief that this is *the* proper, healthy answer to what has historically been understood as a mental illness: transness (Stone 1987; Stryker 2008; Puar 2017). As such, the heteronormative understanding of the trans experience is conceptualised as a mind-body misalignment that needs correction. This correction upon which social acceptance rests involves physically assimilating one's body into what is considered 'natural' and 'healthy' gender embodiment (Clare 2017, 14). The 'healthy' trans person, according to Western society, follows the construct of the gender binary such that it upholds, reinforces, and maintains the strict oppositional binary of a masculine male-bodied man and a feminine female-bodied woman. 'Health' is understood as 'successful normativity' (Puar 2017).

The transgender subject, by definition, queers the expected heteronormative relationship between sexed body and gendered subject, regardless of whether they are gender conforming or nonconforming (Puar 2017). This "transgender phenomenon" has disrupted and denaturalised Western modernity's "normal" reality, "specifically the fiction of a unitary psychosocial gender that is rooted biologically in corporeal substance" (Stryker 1998, 147). This disruption of reality causes cultural anxiety (Puar 2017). This cultural anxiety has led Western society to make sense of transness in a normative way. As such, the transnormative construct works to validate and normalize certain experiences of trans individuals based upon their adherence to the normative gender rules, while rendering those who deviate from the norm as pathologically inferior so as to not disturb mainstream America's perception of reality (Stone 1978; Tatum et al. 2020). The transnormative, in a broad sense, is a transgender narrative palatable to the heteronormative expectations of mainstream American society.

This is where the problem lies - in the denial of a natural and capacitated existence of the nonbinary trans embodiment on the basis that their nonconformity to cultural gender norms of the West is perceived as unnatural, pathological difference. The perverse and coercive phallogocentric logic discussed in the last chapter is at work behind the deployment of this negative instance of difference from the norm. In neoliberal capitalist society, there is a degradation of bodies 'unable' to meet the "proprietary... gendered mandates of bodily comportment" and marking them as debilitated (Puar 2017, 35). This 'debilitation' is figured in terms of what it means to be 'productive', and disqualifies the 'unproductive' individual from positions of power and/or 'knowing', ultimately denying the validity of their own knowledge of 'self'.

The heteronormative ideal is the productive ideal because it creates the necessary components and structure to maximise the function of a capitalist, patriarchal economy (Hartmann 1979, 10-11 & 14; Arruzza 2016, 10). The only way for trans folks to become productive in the eyes of neoliberal capitalist society, and therefore attain full citizenship rights by way of legal documentation, is to be intelligible in heteronormative terms and simulate this 'productive potential' by remaining within, and upholding, the traditional gender binary. Trans participation in society is the reproduction and simulation of these normative values. Reinforcing heteronormativity requires that a trans person must concede to three key assumptions being perpetuated in the transnormative narrative about what 'capacitated trans citizenship' means (Puar 2017). These need attention and reconceptualisation, for they not only work to reinforce the heteronormative narrative of a natural and desirable gender binary, but they are erroneously understood to be essential and universal to the trans experience.

Transnormative Assumptions

The first is that all trans folks are expected, per the DSM-V, to have an internally-rooted feeling of "distress" about their 'misaligned' body and mind (Davy 2015; Tatum et al. 2020). They are expected to feel as though *they* are what is wrong and needs to be changed, due to their 'unnatural' misalignment of mind and body. There are a few issues with this 'distress' criteria. This wrongly assumes that every trans person feels negatively about their physical body or that one is disturbed by their culturally-mismatched gender embodiment. However, not all trans folks feel this quintessential 'distress' or 'wrong body' narrative so readily associated with trans folks. Some trans folks recognise the false biologically determinist relationship that has been assigned to gender and anatomy, and do not feel as though they need certain features to qualify their experienced gender.

This normative assumption of individual distress also misplaces the 'cause' of distress to be naturally occurring within the individual from their nonnormative misalignment of body and mind, rather than recognising the cause of distress being from the normative pressures of society. The pressure to conform, especially in the constant and threatening way in which it is experienced by trans folks, has been shown to psychologically affect and influence individual thought and behaviour with regards to one's self. Socialisation of normative constructs paired with consequences for deviance can negatively impact the mental well-being of individuals, especially if they know they deviate from the norm. If one is taught that they are ill or incorrect, this notion will become internalised and can lead to distress. However, this distress originates from society and is projected onto the individual. But instead of making nonconformity an issue, particularly gender nonconformity, the rigidity of the normative system should be recognised as the limitation. This 'need' to 'correct' should be understood as two fold, as it is a 'need' of the individual because it is a 'need' of the socioeconomic system in which the individual lives.

The second assumption is that in order to 'cure' this distress, one follows the linear path of transitioning in its entirety. The transition process is expected to be undertaken as a whole, not in parts, and in a specific order. To halt this process part of the way through is to be incomplete. To

desire certain parts of the process and not others is not promoted as an option. In a transnormative narrative, there is no acceptable 'in-between' territory, in either physical embodiment or a personal desire for such a mode of being (Puar 2017; Stone 1978). But as illustrated, trans folks have different relationships with their gender identities and how they express them. They are not necessarily normative or fixed over a lifetime. Thus, trans individuals have different relationships to the socially prescribed and medically sanctioned 'gender affirming' treatments for the embodiment of their gender (Clare 2017, 177; Tatum et al. 2020). That is to say, not every trans person wishes for or feels a need to physically alter their bodies to fit normative gender expectations. A trans person can indeed identify as a woman while having male anatomy and not want to change that physical fact. Some wish for HRT but not SRS. Some wish for the opposite. Some want to change their gender marker on legal documents, but do not wish to undergo any of the medical treatments that stand in the way of them being able to make that change (Tatum et al. 2020). In other words, what may make one trans person feel 'at home' in their body is not necessarily that which makes them heteronormative. Therefore, the series of interventions required of trans folks in order to obtain sound legal documents may cause a trans person more distress than their naturally occurring yet culturally 'misaligned' mind-body.

The final assumption goes hand-in-hand with the previous one, which is that through this entire linear transition process, trans folks wish to 'pass' as a cisgendered man or woman. In order to 'pass', one must 'fully' transition. "Until the early 1990s... medical providers' explicit goal for gender transition was to create normal heterosexual men and women who never again identified as trans, gender conforming, gay, lesbian, or bi" (Clare 2017, 178). The marker of transitional success is the ability to 'pass' as a cisgendered man or woman, to erase one's 'trans-ness'. A 'successful transition' is that which cannot be detected (Stone 1987). Transness was meant to be 'cured' and covered up because it did not have a place in society. That is why 'passing' is perceived by legal and medical professionals, and thus mainstream American society, as the ultimate 'final' goal of the transnormative narrative: passing makes a trans person productive according to the terms of the neoliberal-capitalist society of the United States. By passing, transnormative subjects do not disrupt the normal reality of Western society but instead they are 'falling in line' on either side of the M/F divide, facilitating, rather than disrupting, the social reproduction of heteronormative values.

Legal Limits of Gender Variance

The social organisation of this bi-gender system has influenced not just the medical industry, but government and legislation as well. The supposed 'natural' heteronormative gender binary is in fact one of the primary categories of organisation and self-identification utilised in official processes and applications. An American citizen cannot get far without needing to qualify themselves by disclosing this information. There are three major documents of personal identification in the United States: the birth certificate, driver's license/identity card, and the passport. Each of the fifty "united" states has its own rules and regulations regarding the retroactive change of sex/gender marker on these documents. However, most require a full transition, particularly SRS, signed-off on by a medical professional in order to change one's gender marker. This cultural necessity just short of

forces trans folks to undergo medical treatment in order to be accepted into society as either the 'man' or 'woman' that they (must) identify as. By design, this largely excludes GQNB folks. However, that is slowly starting to change.

Eighteen of the fifty American states, roughly one-third, recognises this third gender marker on their state license/identification card, and fewer allow for retroactively amending a birth certificate to match this nonbinary option. Oregon is the most liberal of the states to recognise an X gender marker as they do not require any 'proof of gender' by way of a sign-off from a medical professional. The rest of the 32 states in America do not offer a third gender marker on any documentation, leaving the acceptance - or refusal - of a GQNB person up to the discretion of the institution in question (National Center for Transgender Equality 2020).

In order to update one's gender marker on a passport, today's requirements are an ID that resembles current appearance, a passport photo that resembles current appearance, and "medical certification that indicates you have had appropriate treatment for transition", which is explained in the Frequently Asked Questions: "Your physician determines what appropriate clinical treatment is according to acceptable medical practices, standards and guidelines, and certifies that you have had appropriate clinical treatment for transition to either male or female. *Surgery is not a requirement to get a U.S. passport*" (U.S. Department of State, emphasis in original). Prior to February 2020, the US passport offered only two gender options. Now, people have the option of an 'X' as a third gender marker for nonbinary folks. While this is indeed a major advancement in the liberal direction for identity politics, it is necessary to note that it is a double-edged sword, as not all international countries, let alone domestic states, recognise this third gender and it can cause issues for GQNB trans folks while traveling or working outside of their state of residence. They may face harassment, violence, and even denial of entry into a foreign country. While the 'X' gender marker breaks the binary, it can be understood as more of a stigma than a freedom of choice.

The legality of gender variance on identification documents is the ultimate factor that forces citizens into a binary choice of gender. As mentioned, the gender binary fits with roughly half of the transgender population's desires (Tatum et al. 2020). However, the other half are left with an ultimatum between their mental-wellbeing and their legal/social validity. Legally, above all else, there is an expected congruence between gender labels and physical anatomy. The consequences of incongruent gender identification are outlined in an upcoming section within this chapter. The truth is, gender does not exist in a binary, but rather as an endless and exponential manifestation of the interplay of a multitude of personal factors. Transness is not just about transitioning from one gender to the 'other', but rather, an indication that there is more beyond the binary.

'Trans' Terminology

Considering the heteronormative understanding 'transgender' has come to have in mainstream American society, it is interesting to note that the term originated within the trans community from

an intentionally gender-nonnormative place: until the early 1990s, 'transgender' was used to mediate between 'transsexual' and 'transvestite'. 'Transvestites', now an outdated term for 'crossdressers', are people who periodically dressed in the clothes of the 'opposite' gender, not necessarily wishing to live their lives as that gender. 'Transsexuals' were those who permanently changed their genitals to that of the 'opposite' 'sex'. 'Transgender', then, referred to those who changed "the social perception of one's everyday gender through the manipulation of nongenital signs", experiencing and expressing a particular gender while not altering their body to fit social expectations for that gender's embodiment. The term 'transgender' took on new meaning in the 1990s to become "an umbrella term representing all types of nonnormative expressions of gender or sexed embodiment... as an inflection of 'queer'" (Stryker 1998, 152). This understanding of the term was intended to spark coalition among the nonheteronormative queers who had been left behind by the homonormative, mainstream gay and lesbian movement (Puar 2017, 40).

'Trans' is understood in this paper as identities that queer the dominant relationship of sexed body and gendered subject (Stone 1987, 147) and includes, but is not limited to, the term/identity of 'transgender' both normative and nonnormative alike. A simple, inclusive definition of what it means to be transgender is that one does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. This definition, however, does not explicitly dictate 'what gender' one identifies with, nor in what way they wish to express and embody that gender, contrary to popular/mainstream American understanding. There are a variety of gender expressions, embodiments, and identities that one may manifest while under the 'trans' umbrella. It is important to delineate these three facets of gender to grasp a clearer understanding of the potential for gender variance among all people, and to support that the imposition of a heteronormative gender binary onto every American citizen should be ceased.

Three Aspects of Gender

The gender that one experiences and feels personally aligned with internally is one's gender identity. In the United States, people are given a gender identity at birth (boy or girl) according to their infant genitalia (phallus or vulva, male or female respectively) that is expected to be maintained through one's life. However, not everyone feels harmonious with this assigned identity, regardless of their anatomy. Instead, they may come to personally identify with a different gender than the one indicated on their legal birth documents. This mismatch in identification has created significant obstacles for trans folks in America. "For many transgender people, not having identity documents like driver's licenses or passports that match their gender means that they might not be able to do things that require an ID, like getting a job, enrolling in school, opening a bank account, or traveling. Some transgender people who use an ID that doesn't match their gender or their presentation face harassment, humiliation, and even violence" (National Center for Transgender Equality 2016). In order to update legal documentation of their gender identity/sex marker, one must undergo a series of professionally-sanctioned steps, both medically and legally in accordance with their state's requirements, that make their identity unproblematic and congruent with their expression and embodiment.

Gender expression, simply put, is the way one expresses their gender identity, specifically through behaviour, speech, style, posture, interests, etc. In Western society, certain ways of expressing one's self have been given particular gendered meaning/value such that they may be seen as 'feminine' or 'masculine', and one is expected to express themselves in accordance to their gender assigned at birth. To be an effeminate man or a masculine women used to be understood as some sort of mental disturbance - a negative instance of difference from the heteronormative expectation. Today, variations in gender expression have become more acceptable, such that it is now seen as natural human variance and no longer as a defect or problematic deviance, except perhaps amongst the most conservative of thinkers. Exemplified in the case of homonormativity, there has been an overall acceptance granted to variance in gender expression - as long as an individual maintains normative gender identity and gender embodiment.

Gender embodiment has to do with how gender manifests with particular regard to the human body. Two of the mentioned modes of gender expression, "posture" and "style", could be understood as types of gender embodiment, as they indicate gender with the use of the human body. However, in the context of this paper, gender embodiment refers to how the physical anatomy of the body relates to/indicates one's gender in the traditional Western heteronormative sense. The normative, expected gender embodiments for any person in Western society are male anatomy for someone who identifies as a man, and female anatomy for someone who identifies as a woman. A normative trans embodiment would adhere to these traditional expectations for gender embodiment such that they undergo medical intervention so that their physical body aligns with sociolinguistic expectations for their experienced gender. Variance in gender embodiment is a point of contention in America. Currently, there is merely one arrangement recognised legally, and it falls along the M/F divide. That is, those assigned female at birth who identify as a man would undergo SRS to obtain male sex characteristics. Alternatively, someone assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman would undergo SRS to have physical female sex characteristics traditionally expected of a woman. There is no allowance of an 'in between' option, nor is it acceptable to maintain the physical body one was born with but still be identified officially as the gender of their choice. However, this bi-gender option does not naturally apply to all transgender human beings.

Trans-Variants

The basic categorisations of transgender identity are binary/gender conforming (i.e., trans men and trans women) or genderqueer nonbinary (GQNB), (hetero)normative and non(hetero)normative respectfully. While it may seem as though this is yet another binary distinction being created ironically in the name of diversity, GQNB in and of itself can manifest in a variety of ways and should not be understood as the 'opposite' of the transnormative. In fact, it should be made explicitly clear that there is no intention to rehash the divide between the "subversive transgender" and the "conservative transsexual" (Lane 2009, 139), nor intended to participate in the debate between medicalisation and demedicalization of transness (Puar 2017, 41). But rather, the idea is to illuminate the variance that indeed naturally (re)occurs in humanity across time and space.

As mentioned, the binary/gender conforming trans person could be considered as the transnormative subject, one that upholds heteronormative gender expectations for embodiment, expression, and identity, through a particular medical narrative. With a GQNB transgender identity, there is not necessarily a direct correlation between gender identity and gender expression, nor with either and gender embodiment. For example, a GQNB trans person may not identify with either of the traditional genders and choose ambiguous or androgynous gender expression, not being legible in traditional Western neoliberal, heteronormative terms. Alternatively, someone who is GQNB could choose to express themselves in a more traditionally masculine and male way or feminine and female way, regardless of what their birth-assigned gender is, yet still not self-identify with being a 'man' or a 'woman'. A GQNB person could express their nonbinary gender by playing with a mix of what would be considered traditional masculinity and traditional femininity.

For example, Johnathan van Ness, an American television host and public figure, self-identifies as nonbinary, accepting 'he/him', 'she/her', as well as 'they/them' as pronouns. They have long hair, frequently wear skirts, dresses, and other articles of clothing considered to be women's, yet maintain their natural body hair, including full facial hair, and rarely incorporate makeup into their personal style. Someone like van Ness could be understood as gender fluid, moving fluidly between/among genders, not fixed in time or place. Fame aside, van Ness is fortunate to be able to pass as their gender assigned at birth, indicated on their personal identification documents, and thus avoid harassment and trouble by the legal system. However, that is not the case for all trans folks. Trans folks are essentially given an ultimatum in the United States: conform to and help maintain the binary gender construct of American culture or forfeit the right to have congruent identity documentation, which in turn forfeits their aforementioned basic civilian rights.

Again, this normative congruence between gender identity and embodiment is desired by many trans folks, but for others, it is not what feels natural. Thus, the requirement that is legally and medically imposed upon trans individuals, regardless of their personal desires, for the sake of their validation within neoliberal Western society, should be recognised as a normativized violence against the natural body rather than state-sanctioned inclusive action. For this reason, I recommend a particular intervention to the way in which gender is philosophically conceptualised: a posthumanist intervention, pulling from the work of Karen Barad. It is a turn away from linguistic representation to one of discursive performance, looking to nature's ongoing performativity of diversity for a better understanding of what it means to be human. With this intervention, the variety of nonnormative manifestations of one's gender can be perceived as natural diversity rather than social deviance in need of corrective intervention.

Chapter III

Posthumanist Intervention

It is an undisputed fact that human bodies in heteronormative Western society are expected to align with the established, naturalised sociolinguistic categories of either 'man' or 'woman', from identification to personality to physical embodiment. This is precisely the logic underlying the prescriptive nature of transnormativity as well as the consequence of pathologization of nonnormative transness. As illustrated in the first chapter on normative subjectivities, there is a preconceived expectation for a 'normal' gender identity, expression, and embodiment, based upon the indication of one's physical anatomy. Forthcoming human beings are expected to fall in line with this established structuring of the world such that if, for example, one wants to be intelligible as a woman but was born with male anatomy that is traditionally indicative of a man, they are expected to adjust their bodies in accordance to the rules of gender, to "pass or suffer the consequences" (Gilbert, 96).

In understanding the term 'transgender', the prefix 'trans' indicates a movement, a 'traversing', a going beyond or across. In contrast, there is the prefix 'cis' which means 'on the same side of'. Thus, cis-gender is 'aligned' gender, and trans-gender is an alternative, changed gender from the traditional concept. This bears mention because it illustrates that even in our understanding of what we call the normative transgender experience/embodiment, the terminology denotes a nonnormative difference. According to mainstream American society's response to transness, one cannot be considered a certain gender by merely performing as such. There must be a congruence of the body. Transgender is clearly distinct from gender. 'Transwoman' is clearly distinct from just plain 'woman'. Transness must be clearly disclosed as it does not fit the pre-existing congruence between sociolinguistic understanding of gender and the anatomical elements of one's sex. You can only truly be perceived as a particular gender if you have certain anatomy.

Thus, according to Western society, being born with particular anatomy is the seat of one's gender. This bio-essentialist argument has also been critiqued by feminist, trans, and queer theorists, making the discussion of biology as a factor in transness a sensitive topic to breach. However, the posthumanist intervention offers a way to look at the fact of our biological situation in a dynamic way. But before attending to the Baradian posthumanist intervention, I will start by providing a critique of the contested relationship between language and nature through an engagement with representationalism.

Representationalism: Language as a Transparent Medium of Reality

"The belief that grammatical categories reflect the underlying structure of the world is a continuing seductive habit of mind worth questioning" (Barad 2003, 802).

Barad declares that "language has been granted too much power" (801). She reiterates a warning from Nietzsche "against the mistaken tendency to take grammar too seriously: allowing linguistic structure to shape or determine our understanding of the world, believing that the subject and predicate structure of language reflects a prior ontological reality of substance and attribute" (2003, 802). Representationalist ideology rests on the notion that "beings exist... with inherent attributes"

prior to their physical existence and furthermore, that those beings are independent from their own representation (Barad, 2003, 804). That is to say, beings cannot/do not play an active role in their becoming, but rather are expected to 'naturally' fall in line with sociolinguistic norms that have been figured as natural and true. If they do not, they are deemed incorrect and unnatural. Language has been given more legitimacy than the entities and phenomenon which it is supposed to represent.

Representationalism is deeply entrenched in Western culture. We have come to understand that what manifests contrary to what we understand linguistically is at fault, and that our language is the pure holder of truth and meaning. As such, we have come to 'know' that a woman is feminine with breasts and a uterus, and a man is masculine with facial hair and a phallus. That which does not/cannot meet/match/mirror the linguistic understanding is considered to not only be incorrect, but also unnatural. As such, trans women with male anatomy and trans men with female anatomy are perceived as unnaturally deviant. This echos back to phallogocentrism wherein language is regarded as "fundamental and irreducible expressions of reality that *trumps any different experiential narrative*" (Stone, 1987; emphasis added). That is to say, if one has a lived experience that differs from the normative expectation dictated by sociolinguistic structures, like the example just illustrated, they are automatically invalidated and disqualified from being considered 'correct', and furthermore, cannot claim normalcy/naturalness for they have proven through their nonnormative 'deviance' that they are incapable of 'healthy' thought/knowledge. This is also an illustration of the negative instance of difference dictated by phallogocentrism.

The phallogocentric logic of representationalism does not truly feature a universal understanding of humans as it is advertised to be, but relies instead on the understanding of those in the position of power deemed worthy/capable of creating knowledge: cisgendered, heterosexual, white, able-bodied men. As is inherent in phallogocentric logic, the perspectives of these men are understood as rational, reasonable, and logical. This erroneously figures these representations as unbiased common-sense knowledge, thus lending to their application in a universal and essentialistic way, naturalised over centuries of repetition. Barad makes it clear and known that these representations serve a mediating function between entities, the known and the knower (2003, 804). As Barad argues:

the assumption that language is a transparent medium that transmits a homologous picture of reality to the knowing mind finds its parallel in a scientific theory that takes observation to be the benign facilitator of discovery, a transparent lens passively gazing at the world. (2007, 97)

This "representationalist belief in the power of words to mirror preexisting phenomena" has given us a strange asymmetrical trust in our language over the material evidence of our world (Barad 2003, 806). Representationalism is a Cartesian byproduct, "a consequence of the Cartesian division between 'internal' and 'external' that breaks along the line of the knowing subject" (806). We trust our linguistic representations more than we trust that which is supposedly being

represented. Simultaneously, there is a taken-for-granted ontological gap between representation and that which is represented, which removes the much needed accountability of these supposed essential, fixed distinctions made between entities (Barad 2011, 123). There is a curious and contradictory logic in action, one which supposes that our linguistic representations mirror reality while also figuring a separation between our knowledge and that which we perceive to know.

Representationalism and Language-Nature Distinction

Representationalism is humanist as it centers a human understanding/perception of reality. By centering the human perspective in such a way, there is a simultaneous and intentional decentering of nature as well as a placement of subordination beneath the human. This foolishly disregards the factual place of the human as part of nature, as coming from *within* nature (Barad 2011, 150). This anthropocentric logic supposes that humans have some particular knowledge or grasp of nature, some level of awareness of the world and the way it works, beyond what is capable of any other part of the world. This supports the asymmetrical trust in word over world and has allowed humans to speak on behalf of nature because 'we know better'. This has permitted us to deem certain acts of nature as 'wrong' or 'unnatural' due to the fact that it does not fit our established human understanding (Barad 2011, 126). It is no coincidence that non-Western societies that centre and revere nature have also been able to conceptualise, accept, and normalise genders that exist beyond a binary gender arrangement. This supports the idea that the heteronormative gender binary of Western society is a construct meant to facilitate Western neoliberal socioeconomic demands rather than being a reflection of biological truth.

While claiming to exist above, beyond, and exterior to nature, there is the simultaneous claim that we can 'know' nature. This idea that humans are able to speak on behalf of nature is the precise reasoning behind the Western regulation of nonnormative bodies. Western society decrees that there is a natural way in which one can and should identify, express, and embody their gender; deviations from this prescribed norm are incorrect, unnatural, and in need of correction. But again recalling that which is made clear and known by Barad, these representations crafted from the minds of men possess a gap, a break, a distance between the knower and the known that brings into question the truth-factor of these representations (2003, 804). It is presumptuous to think that these representations are more accessible to us than the matter which they represent (806).

From Baradian posthumanism, there is an ultimate call for an alternative to this representationalist ontology. There is a need to move focus from questions of correspondence between description and reality to matters of practice/doings/actions that give language their meaning (Barad 2003, 802). This performative alternative shifts our habit of heavy linguistic representation to what is referred to as 'discursive performativity'. Performativity contests the unexamined habits of mind that have granted excessive power to language to determine what is real (801). This focus on action challenges the presumption of the fixity of essential categories. Furthermore, it challenges the fixity of biology/nature by bringing attention to both the dynamism of nature and its active role in

the materialisation of the world. The ontological alternative to representationalism offered in the Baradian posthumanist intervention is called agential realism.

Agential Realist Ontology

The recognition of matter's active role in its own becoming is a philosophical account called "agential realism" (Barad 2003, 810). The agential realist ontology is "the basis for Barad's posthumanist performative account of the production of material bodies" (814). It allows for an ontological alternative to representationalism, which separates the world into 'words and things' such that the validity of these representations can be questioned, and instead offers an intimate relational ontology in its place (811). What has traditionally been understood as the observer/knower/subject and the observed/known/object through representationalism, Barad's relational ontology levels the hierarchical binary and instead recognises a "causal relationship between specific exclusionary practices embodied as specific material configurations of the world and specific material phenomena... the apparatuses of bodily production and the phenomena produced" (814). Ultimately, agential realist ontology shifts the focus from linguistic representations to discursive performativity as the origins of truth. Utilising Barad's agential realism, we can observe the existence of nonnormative transgender embodiment as a display of truth, as a natural variance, rather than a pathological incorrectness due to its misalignment with cultural understandings. Instead of understanding a particular body to have particular inherent attributes, agential realism invites us to witness the becoming of the body and its attributes in what is called a phenomena.

Intra-Action of Phenomena: Origin of Truth

According to Barad in her reading of physicist Niels Bohr, phenomena are the primary epistemological unit rather than "independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties" (815). Bohr believed that theoretical concepts are not ideational but rather are specific arrangements reliant upon the apparatus doing the measuring. Relating this to gender and transness, the theoretical concept of an exclusively binary gender is a specific understanding and arrangement configured by Western men who figured it was the proper way to be. Indeed, there is no biological basis for the congruence between genitals and gender. Thus, the conceptual construct of a normative gender embodiment can be understood as an apparatus from the Western imaginary for measuring the validity of humans according to neoliberal terms under the guise of what is natural.

The causal relationship that exists between entities/apparatuses within a phenomena is an intra-action. This word 'intra-action'/'intra-activity' that has been used is Barad's clever wordplay to illustrate the intimacy between the two entities in their interaction, rather than the ontological gap due to the explicit separation of entities supposed in the representationalist understanding. In the posthumanist reconfiguration, entities are intimately bound in the intra-action, in a phenomena. While entities are intimately bound together in an intra-action, "agential cuts" demonstrate a separability between the entities along the distinct boundaries/properties being realised within the

phenomena (815). This is referred to as 'exteriority-within' phenomena. These distinct boundaries/properties being realised are the knowledge in phenomena that help construct reality. Barad explains:

It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the 'components' of phenomena become determinate and that particular concepts become meaningful. A specific intra-action enacts an agential cut effecting a separation between 'subject' and 'object'. That is, the agential cut enacts a local resolution within the phenomena of the inherent ontological indeterminacy. In other words, relata do not preexist relations; rather, relata-within-phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions. Crucially, then, intra-actions enact agential separability - the local condition of exteriority within phenomena. The notion of agential separability is of fundamental importance, for in the absence of a classical ontological condition of exteriority between observer and observed it provides the condition for the possibility of objectivity. (815)

All of this to say, an entity, or person, makes themselves known within the context of a particular intra-action. Furthermore, entities within phenomena make sense of each other based upon their own understanding, their own apparatuses of knowledge. Outside of such intra-action, one cannot claim to have knowledge about an entity before they themselves interact with it. Indeed one may adopt the knowledge of another's interaction/apparatus, such as Western society has adopted the gender binary as a whole, but Barad's posthumanist intervention is an encouragement for individual discovery of truth. While the mainstream Western conceptualisation of 'woman' and 'man' ultimately come down to having particular embodiments, the posthumanist performative intervention calls for the release of these pre-existing notions - the relata - of 'proper' humanness. Instead of conceiving nonnormative gender embodiment to be incorrect, unnatural, and indications of pathological deficiency, we should alternatively understand it as natural human variance making itself known. This concept of nature 'making itself known' brings us to posthumanist understanding of agency.

The Agency of Nature

Baradian posthumanist performative philosophy is a call back to nature in such a way as to give nature back her agency. Rather more accurately, it is a call to understand that nature has, and always has had, agency - a fact that Western understanding has wrongfully denied for centuries. In the Baradian posthumanist sense, "agency is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices through dynamics of intra-activity" (2003, 827). This posthumanist understanding of agency differs slightly from our humanist conception of agency, which has an implication of awareness and conscious intention meant to empower the human as an independent being possessing the freedom to act. Nature is not thought to have consciousness in the same way and thus erroneously figured to lack agency. However, the posthumanist sense of agency recognises nature's ability to enact changes. Barad says, "agency is not an attribute whatsoever - it is

‘doing’/‘being’ in its intra-activity” (2003, 827). Agency is not a human-exclusive attribute, but a ‘doing’, a ‘becoming’.

It is undeniable that nature has her own course of action, her own agenda that is independent and unbeknownst to humans regardless of what we may think we know/understand. This agenda involves change and is inherently dynamic, an unstoppable force possessing unpredictable potential. Indeed, “the future is always open-ended and indeterminate: no certain predictions can be made” (Lane 2009, 144). Nature can be influenced to an extent, that is true, but she cannot be stopped. For example, forests get levelled in order for homes to be built, but without fail, if that land were to be abandoned, nature would take over again. We have seen ancient and unused temples overgrown with foliage. In fact, land does not need to be void of humanity for nature to persist. Instances of trees growing through chain linked fences have been observed, or invasive species breaking through concrete sidewalks. Despite the efforts of humans, nature persists in her active becoming. As evident in the persistence of plants, so too is the unstoppable ‘becoming’ of nature evident in the persistence of trans existence - more on this forthcoming.

It is not just forces of nature that have an agenda/agency, but also the building blocks of nature: matter. “To figure matter as merely an end product rather than an active factor in further materialisations, is to cheat matter out of the fullness of its capacity” (Barad 2003, 810). This agency of matter is observable in evolution. A prime example is Darwin’s finches. In short, Charles Darwin observed populations of finches across the Galapagos islands. He noted that according to the different locations, the birds had developed beaks that were advantageous to the available food source of that area. “Darwin introduced history into biology and nature: animals and plants changed from being essential types made by God, to variants that develop in interaction and through chance events” (Lane 2009, 144). We can see through the evolution of matter that indeed it is not about reflection, or a mirroring of that which came before, but a gradual change, a diffraction from what was. As such, we can recognise the essential type of human, evolved from primates, that continues to evolve past biologically essential roles of ‘male’, now understood as ‘men’, and ‘female’, now understood as ‘women’.

If the perpetual unfolding of the potential of matter has indicated anything of certain to our human observation, it is that not only change but continuous variation is the most natural state of being. There is a never-ending ‘doing’ of nature, a continuous matter of becoming and a continuous becoming of matter. To understand that matter has agency is to understand that biology and matter have their own plan and agenda: nature/biology/matter actively persists in its becoming. This is the point of Barad’s intervention on “how matter comes to matter” (801). It is about understanding “the precise causal nature of productive practices that takes into account the fullness of matter’s implication in its ongoing historicity” (810). The idea is that matter plays an active role in the materialisation of itself and ultimately, all of reality - the biological and the psychological. Indeed, the stardust matter from whence we came is responsible for not only the chromosomes that dictate

sex characteristics, but also for the neural synapses and the chemicals that produce behaviour and personality.

The Performativity of Nature

This becoming of nature/matter can be understood in terms of the performativity of nature/matter. But again, like agency, the concept of performativity that we have come to understand in relation to humans is slightly different from the one with which we can apply to nature. The humanist understanding of performativity that is best known, particularly within the feminist and queer theorist community, is that of Judith Butler (Barad 2003, 807). As mentioned in the introduction, Butler's notion of performativity is humanist in nature as it is figured in her theorising about gender, a decidedly human concept. Barad's posthumanist performativity looks beyond this human lens and taps into the understanding of science studies scholar, Andrew Pickering, who defines performativity in relation to the action of atoms - decidedly posthumanist in its consideration of the nonhuman experience (Barad 2003, 807-808). Pickering's notion of performativity ignores discursive dimensions and is purely concerned with observable 'actions'/'doings' of atoms. This performative understanding shifts focus from how linguistic representations (words) communicate reality to *observing* what is being shown in discursive practices (actions). Through posthumanist performativity, it can be understood that the truth of an entity makes itself known through action/doing. The performativity of nature may allow us to rethink the performativity of humans: this is the mission of the posthumanist intervention. We must understand that nature and matter are in the process of continuously making reality known.

Barad elaborates on the performativity of nature in an article called *Nature's Queer Performativity* (2011). In this piece, Barad explores nonhuman paradoxes of nature making the point that while these occurrences may be "inexplicable in terms of classical notions of identity" (141), it does not make them any less natural or in need of corrective intervention. "Paradoxes exhibited... are persistently denied any empirical purchase, as though the thought of allowing nature such a radical degree of ontological complexity is too much to bear" (132). Yet, it is a well known fact how complex our natural world is.

Nonnormative Gender Embodiment: Naturally Beyond the Binary

The queer performativity and agency of nature can be understood in relation to nonnormative transgender embodiment two fold. To reiterate, nonnormative transgender embodiment merely refers to the incongruence between one's gender and genitals according to traditional expectations. As such, despite one being naturally born with particular anatomy and one's authentic and individually experienced gender, if not aligned according to sociolinguistic expectations, is considered 'not normal' and ultimately wrong.

First, transness should be understood as natural variance, whether the process of transitioning is undergone or not. At the root of transness is the understanding that indeed, men can be born into 'women's' bodies and women can be born into 'men's' bodies. Prior to undergoing the transition

process, there are men living in 'women's' bodies and women living in 'men's' bodies. Nonnormative transgender embodiment is evidence that one's gender identity and expression does not, in fact, need to align with genitals in a particular way. The uterus is not the seat of femininity; the phallus is not the seat of masculinity. Physical anatomy is merely the mechanics of biological reproduction. Seeing as people are born with a particular body, despite what their gender identity and expression are, their naturally given bodies should not be deemed unnatural by the state, and furthermore in need of 'correction', on the grounds that they do not fit sociolinguistic understandings of what a 'woman'/'man' is. Indeed, no one should be forced/expected to physically alter their given body in order to participate in society. Only if transitioning is the desire of the individual should it be considered necessary.

Second, the 'transgender phenomena' is not a contemporary occurrence. Trans folks have always existed, though their existence has been heavily suppressed in favour of maintaining the normative status quo - the static quo - leading to the false understanding that they have 'never existed'. However, nature has persisted in manifesting transgender subjects throughout human history despite the efforts of mainstream societies to make them disappear. This is much like the previous example of foliage persistently 'becoming' in a space in which they were removed. Despite attempts to silence trans folks and cut them out of society, generation after generation and across societies worldwide, they naturally reoccur. The performativity of nature continues to manifest nonnormative gender identities, expressions, and embodiments, leading to the argument that transgender folks are not only natural, but also an indication of human evolution.

We need to adjust the way in which we approach the reality of human embodiment. Instead of editing bodies to match sociolinguistic representations in the name of nature, we need to tailor our linguistic understandings to the reality that nature is making known to us repeatedly. Barad's posthumanist intervention brings into question the supposed inherent, fixed properties of an entity which 'define' it. Applying this intervention to the Western conceptualisation of normative gender embodiment, the essential properties of 'man' and 'woman' can be interrogated.

Conclusion

It can be understood, now, that there is a more inclusive theoretical approach to conceptualising transgender embodiment, particularly nonnormative gender embodiment, in a way that does not stigmatise or pathologize the nonnormativity as condemnable deviance but rather, recognises this phenomena as natural human variance. This is not to demonise the upholding of the gender binary by those who follow the transnormative narrative, but to bring under fire the institutional imposition of such a particular mind-body arrangement on all American citizens despite what an individual's desires may be. The logic of such an imposition has been questioned; posthumanism provides the answer.

Phallogocentrism has been named as the logic underlying the normative regulation of all nonheteronormative gender expressions, identities, and embodiments in Western society. This logic system, apparent in representationalism, allows for only a narrow perspective of what is 'normal', favouring the masculine and the linguistic as reliable sources for truth, and condemning the feminine and performative alternatives. The limitations and perversion of this logic are hopefully clear through recognising the inherent devaluing and disposability of the feminine, the performative, and the experiential on the mere grounds that they differ from the normative exemplar. This in turn creates a hierarchy of difference in which the Others are deemed condemnable and unreliable, stifling diverse perspectives.

Phallogocentric and representationalist logic is so deeply lodged in Western society that it is difficult to think around it. We have come to trust what we have learned through our language more than what can be gleaned through observations of the physical, living world. It has undoubtedly shaped our social understanding and practice in a self-willed and maladaptive way through the insistence that language is true, and performances/experiences/evidence to the contrary must be mistaken. It has lead to an understanding of 'proper' human gender embodiment, such that certain anatomy supposedly dictates one's personality, desires, expression, inclination, etc. Alternatively, it is understood that a certain personality cannot be considered 'natural' if it is contrary to what is expected based upon an individual's anatomy. But how can it be logical to figure that the body one is given, and the brain/personality that is manifested along with it, are unnatural due to it differing from a pre-established social construct? Western society as a whole has yet to fully accept and understand that gender is a social construct and not a biological basis of being. This is not to invalidate gender, but rather to insist that there is not a 1:1 congruence between physical anatomy and individual gender identity. Gender should be understood as an essence of being. Based on the three aspects of gender discussed, this essence can manifest across multiple facets of a being in an exponential variety of ways.

Perhaps it can be understood, then, that phallogocentric logic has gone too far in its regulation of bodies in its decree to physically alter the body, effectively sterilising people, in order for their gender identity and embodiments to align according to pre-established neoliberal, patriarchal,

sociolinguistic expectations. This logic system is so inward facing that it fails to see the fact of human origins coming from nature, born of her natural inclination towards diversity and variance.

Society is complex, humans are complex, nature is complex; these are widely agreed upon facts. Yet, the simplistic Western bi-gender system is enforced generation after generation under the illusion of natural order while rejecting/resisting more diverse and complex but naturally reoccurring nonnormative ways of being. The only 'natural order' is one of continuous change, evolution, diversity, and variety. This supposedly 'necessary' correlation between body and gender needs to end. We need to detach 'female anatomy' from 'woman' and 'male anatomy' from 'man'. We need to focus our awareness on how nature has varied, exponentially so, in the physical manifestations she has produced in all of her existence. The unpredictability of nature should not be discounted but rather, revered.

Moreover, it should be recognised that in all of her unpredictability and variability, nature has consistently produced nonnormative transgender embodiments for centuries. Transness is not a contemporary phenomena. Transness naturally appears all throughout human history. Yet, we have interfered with and 'erased' their existence because it did not fit within the neat context that 'flawlessly' (re)produces Western society according to its neoliberal necessities. We erased a consistent mode of being based upon the false claim that their embodiment was unnatural. Yet, they have been produced time again by virtue of nature. Regardless of how much mainstream society has denied their existence, we cannot help but to have witnessed their constant reemergence across space and time.

This posthuman intervention also applies to embodiments of intersex folks. Their existence provides more evidence of nature breaking the binary. Born with ambiguous genitalia, these folks indicate the lack of fixed, determined boundaries in nature. Phallogocentric logic does not recognise this embodiment as legitimate, because one must be clearly distinguishable by their genitals. As such, intersex folks are 'corrected', often at birth or shortly thereafter, to 'fit' the anatomy they most closely resemble and from there are assigned, by default, the gender identity to match. Today, we are hearing many of these now-grown intersex children speak up about their disapproval of this being done to their bodies. Many wish that they had been left alone. Some identify as the 'other' gender then the one they were assigned. Some identify as nonbinary, just like their genitalia at birth. Some are unhappy about the lack of sensation they feel due to this cosmetic surgery. Many are left sterilised, like their post-transition transgender siblings.

Every human embodiment comes down to how we can perceive/fit it into our current knowledge structure. We have lost sight of the fact that words were intended to describe and make communicable that which occurs in reality: nature preexists the human linguistic understanding; matter preexists the human understanding. We need to humble ourselves and pay attention to nature and stop figuring nature in terms of what the human needs and what the human understands. We must relax this rigid and limited binary of understanding the human. The fact that

men are born into 'women's' bodies, and women are born into 'men's' bodies needs to be reconceptualized as nature's performativity, as a naturally manifesting phenomena. Instead of needing to correct these bodies in the name of what is natural, we should see these embodiments as natural and adjust our linguistic understanding instead to include these broader understandings of 'man' and 'woman'. We must de-gender our genitals and de-genital our concept of gender.

Gender variance should not be subject to social, legal, and medical systems that impose a physical alteration on all trans bodies. As much as there are definitive properties in this world, we have erroneously believed congruence between gender identity and gender embodiment to be one. There is no true biological basis for one's gender identity and expression to match their embodiment. People naturally exist, and continue to do so, in a variety of ways. Instead of questioning the nonnormative trans embodiment as unnatural, the imposition of certain gender binaries as physical correctives, confining the body to certain legal, medical, social understandings of gender, should be questioned.

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