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Practices of freedom and the disruption of binary genders: thinking *with* trans

Abstract

This article, inspired by a reading of O’Shea’s piece in this journal in 2018 which problematized the production of ‘normal’ identities, considers the ‘practices of freedom’ performed by non-binary trans people and their capacity to embody resistance against binary heteronormative gender intelligibility. We want to think *with* trans in order to challenge gender binaries and argue that their practices of freedom not only transform themselves, but also others. We suggest that this could be understood as a form of care of the self, producing new ways of doing gender which are not reducible to ‘man’ or ‘woman’ but that produce new histories and subjectivities. Given the complicated ways which non-binary trans people engage in care of the self we propose that it is possible to understand this as a form of organizing that embodies an ethics which disturbs and recodes the dominant way that gender is organized. They prefigure an idea and practice of trans organizing, attempting to move beyond dualisms, opening new possibilities for liveable lives.

Key words: Practices of Freedom, Non-binary Trans people, Thinking *with* Trans, Trans organization, Foucault, Butler.

Introduction

Saoirse O’Shea ends hir article ‘This Girl’s Life: An Autoethnography’ by posing this question: ‘How may we organize to make lives liveable rather than foreclose them?’ (2018: 17)ⁱ. Being hir, a non-binary trans person, enbee, living in a heterosexual hegemonic order (Butler, 1993a, 1993b, 2004) the answer is not obvious. The ‘heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ (Butler, 1990: 24), producing intelligible binary genders through regulatory practices that produce coherent identities and truths about gender norms. The individual is all but compelled to identify with the binary gender position in the order of discourse to become a viable subject (Foucault, 1970; Kenny; 2012; Lee et al., 2008). If these norms of behaviour are not followed, if a person fails to conform, they become what Butler – following Kristeva - (1993b) called abject, or outside the social.

Because they disrupt the neat alliance between sex and gender (Butler, 1990) the abjection of non-binary trans people often makes their lives unlivable or less livable, which is commonly observed by researchers in relation to other transgender nonconforming (TGNC) people (O'Shea, 2019; Schilt and Westbrook, 2009; Author reference; Tauches, 2006; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2016). O'Shea's question is addressed to everyone, but particularly to those in critical organization studies who wish to find ways to disrupt binary and asymmetrical gender identities in and beyond organizations. As a partial answer, we see in (what Foucault calls) the 'practices of freedom' of non-binary trans people a reflexive attitude we call here thinking *with* trans. In this article we propose that thinking *with* trans is a critical reflection aimed at disrupting binary heteronormative assumptions, and at the same time promoting practices of freedom in organization for everyone. Binary thinking is an ontoepistemological strategy that shapes our representations, subjectivities and practices within organizations and beyond them. It is reproduced in our writing and our lives, constraining, limiting and normalizing the way that that we can live in organizations (Knights and Tullberg, 2012; Knights, 2015). Like many others, we want to contribute to rethinking and challenging these dualisms by exploring the ways that TGNC people embody resistance through their practices of freedom, whether in terms of dress, speech, bodily comportment, social relations or any element of gendered performance.

Many contemporary authors have written about gender and identity in the context of organizations, and our paper builds on much of this work (Ahonen et al., 2014; Brewis et al., 1997; Calás et al., 2009; Author reference; Author references; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004; Zanoni et al., 2010). Characterized broadly by a reliance on post-structuralist theory, some of this work has explored O'Shea's question - how to expand the possibilities of liveable lives in organizations (Linstead and Pullen, 2006; Pullen et al., 2017; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2016) and disrupt dualist forms of thought (Callis, 2014; Kelan, 2010; Knights, 2015; Linstead and Brewis, 2004; Schilt and Connell, 2007). Building on the growth of research on TGNC people in recent years (Davis, 2009; McFadden, 2015; Schmidt et al., 2011) and considering that non-binary people live their lives beyond a binary gender order, we are specifically interested in exploring how non-binary identities have a capacity to embody resistance, to be resistant bodies (Thanem, 2015). Of course

all bodies have a capacity for resistance, but enbee identities seem to be particularly relevant in terms of problematizing the gender order. We use Foucault's concept of 'practices of freedom' to reflect on the capacity of TGNC people to resist the binary code and help us to develop the idea of thinking *with* trans and trans organization. To help us with this task, we draw on Foucault (1984a, 1993, 1994a) and Butler's (1990, 1993a, 1993b, 2004) approaches to power, resistance, and gender identity. Foucault (1983) asserts that the main goal of all his work was always to analyse the ways in which human beings become subjects, enabling in this process the emergence of new forms of identity. Influenced by (amongst many other theorists) Foucault's conception of power, Butler (1990) makes similar moves, seeking to understand the ways in which gender identities might be subverted. For Foucault (1978) resistance is not in a position of exteriority to power, but is always shaped by it. In this sense, Butler's thinking is influenced by Foucault, with both social theorists problematizing the binary opposition between power and resistance, considering them as interdependent and co-productive rather than oppositional in producing the subject (Harding et al., 2017, Rumens 2017).

Our focus on non-binary trans people is an intellectual and political strategy which allows us to explore the tensions and contradictions in the binary order (Brubaker, 2016). We want to expand the possibilities of contemporary subject positions, especially when considering how non-binary trans people encourage us to think about subjection, abjection, power and freedom. Breaking with an oppositional structuralist logic (either/or), we understand that the practice of any subject position is always exercised in relation to others (both/and), and so a non-binary practice of freedom also potentially transforms others. The implications of this paper are hence not 'only' addressed to trans subjects, but to all subjects, perhaps especially cis subjects for whom the question of gender identity seems to be less troubling because it seems less problematic. For us, the very problematization of knowledge about sex and gender produced by the classifications of organization is itself a practice of freedom that has the potential to enable us to think differently (Sawicki, 2013) and give voice to the abject (Stryker, 2006).

We begin by discussing identity, subjectivity, and their relations with organization in the context of what Foucault would call biopower. After that, we review the concept of governmentality in Foucault and its relation to the care of the self and practices of freedom, highlighting their ethical aspects. We then move on to consider how gender

binary heteronormativity is challenged and disrupted by the practices of freedom exercised by O'Shea in his autoethnography. We conclude by suggesting that thinking *with* trans can provide an understanding of how non-binary trans people produce subjectivity, and hence encourage us to rethink binary questions of identity and subjectivity in organization. We also suggest that the idea of trans organization opens up organizational theory to different gendered becomings, and that a wider idea of transorganization encourages us to think about other becomings too.

Identity, Subjectivity, and Trans organization

The concept of identity has often been employed to understand people in organizations (Nkomo and Cox, 1996). We understand it as a set of relational interactions produced materially and symbolically by language and representation (Butler, 1993a; Braidotti, 1997), and thus also as political categories that produce and reproduce relations of power (Jones and Stablein, 2006). Identities are points of connection that position and make the subject viable, since identities are discursively constructed practices resulting from a chaining of the subject into the order of discourse (Foucault, 1970; Hall, 2000). Identities and subjectivities are interconnected but they are not identical. Subjectivity encompasses the historical, social, and political possibilities of agency, while identity is linked to consciousness, desire and politics concerning what is imagined to be personal to the individual (Braidotti, 1993). In this way, identity emerges when the subjective, that is, the historical, political and social possibilities of existence, connects to the personal. Or, identity is the place of connection between the individual and the social. Gender identities are forms of organization (Baines, 2010) that produce what is defined as normal and abnormal, what Acker (1990) terms 'gendered organization'. We think that an understanding of identities as forms of everyday organizing can be gained through Foucault's studies on power relations, specifically the concept of governmentality that aims to portray the techniques and rationalities used by modern neoliberal states in the government of both populations and of selves through the exercise of biopower.

It has been argued that sexual dimorphism, the binary notion that there are two different and opposite sexes that bind gender identity to genitalia or biological characteristics emerged recently in human history (Foucault, 1992; Laqueur, 1992). It is a discourse which grounds itself in anatomy to establish not only corporeal differences, but also

moral, behavioral, and political distinctions, making gender into perhaps the most enduring identity. The syllogism ‘genitalia=sex=gender’ powerfully underpins a binary conception of each of those termsⁱⁱ. This binary system produces the assumption that gender equals sex, and that ‘male’ and ‘female’ can only become intelligible when grounded in sexual difference, reifying ‘the suite of cultural, legal, and institutional practices that maintain normative assumptions that there are two and only two genders, that gender reflects biological sex’ (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009: 441, see also Bento, 2008).

Considering sex as biological and gender as the cultural dynamic that acts on a biologically prior body assumes that there is a body that exists outside of discourse, history and culture. Butler (1990: 11) affirms that this approach to gender suggests ‘a certain determinism of gender meanings inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies, where those bodies are understood as passive recipients of an inexorable cultural law’. Her criticisms of this deterministic relation between sex and gender rely on the idea that both are discursive and historical categories. ‘Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex’ (Butler, 1990: 10), because gender works as the apparatus of production through which the sexes are established. If gender attributes ‘are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction’ (Butler, 1988: 528). Butler also states that ‘As Foucault and others have pointed out, the association of a natural sex with a discrete gender and with an ostensibly natural ‘attraction’ to the opposing sex/gender is an unnatural conjunction of cultural constructs in the service of reproductive interests’ (Butler, 1988: 524)

For Foucault, it is no mere coincidence that the binary conception of gender grounded in the biological body emerges in the 18th century, a period in which population control becomes fundamental to the modern neoliberal state, making ‘biological features of the human species became the object of political strategy’, which he terms biopower (2007: 1). His term highlights the processes by which our bodies become a central focus of power and control, constituting itself as a biocracy (Fleming, 2014). By analysing the memoir of the intersex person Herculine Barbin, Foucault (1980) shows the relationships between binary sex and biopower, questioning the natural and biological accounts of sex, and

instead thinking about sex in terms of history, power and discourse. The heteronormative categorization of living beings into a binary gender order produces knowledge as biopower, establishing gender intelligibility (and normally patriarchy too) which embeds these assumptions into the operations and classifications of organizations (Foster, 2011; Repo, 2016; Sanders, 2017). Even the existence of a variety of masculinities and femininities does not disrupt this intelligibility, keeping the binary itself untouchable (Linstead and Brewis, 2004). It can be performed differently, and in subversive ways, but the binary as such is untouched (Kelan, 2010; Schilt and Connell, 2007).

The gender order is a governmental rationality which reflects discursive social norms that constitute the possibilities of viable subjects (Pullen et al., 2016). Nonetheless, to insist on this as a determinist, or structuralist, position would be to deny both the possibility of personal agency, or indeed of wider forms of social change. It is true that non-binary trans people, or indeed any people, cannot constitute themselves outside the norms of biopower, but the idea of ‘practices of freedom’, which we explore below, insists that new performances of identity are possible. We suggest that this involves the hesitant coproduction of new norms, new organizing principles, which we conceptualise here as trans organization. Positing and performing trans organization enhances the capacity of non-binary trans people to organize gender in different and multiple ways in their embodied resistance to the binary. It is a practice of freedom which creates new ways of organizing gender, a form of embodied ethics and activism which rests on multiple ‘instances of recognition-based organizing’ (Tyler 2019: 48).

Many organizational researchers have explored the potential of TGNC people to disrupt the binary (Budge *et al.*, 2010; Muhr et al., 2016; Muhr and Sullivan, 2013; Author reference; Rumens, 2017; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2016) yet the specific performances of *non-binary* trans people have less often been the focus of attention. Some authors declare that TGNC people do not challenge gender binaries (Schilt, 2006; Schilt and Westbrook, 2009) while others affirm that they do (Brewis *et al.*, 1997; Connell, 2010; Schilt and Connell, 2007; Thanem, 2010; Thanem *et al.*, 2016). The basic argument of the former is that many transgender people normalise their bodies following a binary logic. For example, Schilt and Westbrook’s work on transgender people in the workplace concludes that their presence does not disrupt power regimes but in fact reproduces them (2009). Kelan (2010) suggests that, theoretically, there are two options for questioning

the binary of gender: (1) by performing the existence of more than two gender options, a ‘multiple’ logic or (2) by the offer of only one option, an ‘unitary’ logic. Both options are ‘post-dualist’ in the sense that they attempt to transcend the either/or. Pullen, Rhodes and Thanem (2017) suggest a different strategy which relies on the concept of ‘becoming-woman’ developed by Deleuze and Guattari and grounded in process philosophy. Rather than static categories which need to be overcome, the social world is reframed as a continual becoming which leaves the question as to what we might become rather more open.

Our focus here is on what sort of trans organization might be produced through the practices of freedom of non-binary trans people. We assume that Foucauldian accounts of biopolitics and governmentality are central to understanding the power/knowledge embedded and embodied in contemporary forms of organizing, and that the conditions under which gender becomes an object of knowledge for organizing is directly related to the conditions of knowledge production. In this sense, to produce different knowledge ‘requires finding ways to develop theorizations and practices that turn this modality of power against itself’ (Ahonen et al., 2014: 263). This is why we turn to another set of concepts from Foucault, that of ‘practices of freedom’, which we think encourage us to imagine different forms of organizing.

Ethics and Practices of Freedom: the care of the self

Biopolitics requires a ‘governmental’ apparatus of power that establishes a link between the population and the individual. In Foucault, the term governmentality has two main meanings. First, the techniques and forms of rationality which are used in modern states in order to govern populations, and secondly the subjects’ relation to themselves, in other words, techniques of the self. This article is primarily concerned with the second meaning of the term, the government of the self by oneself in the context of broader regimes of government. The process by which someone can exercise those powers he calls the ‘care of the self’ (1984a). In this work Foucault challenges us to develop a new relation to the self that enhances our ‘practices of freedom’ within established orders, and which expands our possibilities of existence as subjects (Sawicki, 2013, Gallo 2017). This discussion of the self in his later work is crucial ‘because it is these technologies that allow individuals to create new modes of being, distinct from those imposed by the

workings of power regimes' (Starkey and Hatchuel, 2002: 642) and which problematize the limits of historical possibilities. Care of the self must be understood as 'the ways in which individuals constitute themselves through practices of freedom' (Allen, 2011: 43) to make their lives liveable.

The care of the self is an aesthetic and ethical form of work which explores new ways of living by examining the limits of historical possibilities of modes of being and questioning the established rules which allow an individual to become a subject (Rajchman, 1992). Writing on Foucault and ethics, Dey and Steyaert (2016) don't define ethics as a normative ideal or a universal moral theory to evaluate people's actions, but as a practice that must be 'critical and creative dealing with the limits imposed by power' (2016: 627). To talk of governmentality and care of the self is hence necessarily also to refer to the limits prescribed by governmental rationalities. The care of the self can promote new ways of life beyond the existential possibilities established by hegemonic power/knowledge relations, bringing to the production of the self an '(un)certain degree of freedom [...] – a freedom that is consistent with [*Foucault's*] oppositional stance towards existing power/knowledge regimes' (Starkey and Hatchuel, 2002: 642). Or, as Gallo puts it, 'care of the self – is a more 'active' stand in relation to power' (2017: 691). In other words, in Foucault the possibility of agency and resistance is expressed through care of the self, both resisting and reproducing dominant systems of control. But resistance is polysemic, unstable, and always shifting. It is a multidirectional, unpredictable, and interdependent interplay where power and resistance are forged and limited by history (Harding et al., 2017).

This means that the care of the self is not an individualistic task, because nobody can govern themselves in isolation. It is practiced and exercised always through relations. 'Care of the self, then, is intimately related to care for others' (Starkey and Hatchuel, 2002: 646) because the government of yourself is always in relation to others and in a particular social context. The care of the self produces practices that cannot be disconnected from power relations but neither can it be reduced to power/knowledge regimes and government by the other. This is a practice that 'will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are' (Foucault, 1984b: 46). The care of the self is 'knowledge of self – [...] but it is also the knowledge of a certain number of rules of conduct or principles

which are at the same time truths and regulations' (Foucault, 1984a: 5). Or as Butler (1993a: 18) asserts, where 'there is an 'I' who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that 'I' and forms in language the constraining trajectories of its will'. Discourse, identity, power – they all enable and constrain at one and the same time.

We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order. This is surely a fair description of part of what power does. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are. (Butler 1997: 2)

This is rather abstract theory, so how does it relate to the practices of non-binary trans people? We think that it means that no-one can voluntarily, heroically, change direction and control history, but that they 'can, sometimes, unravel the strands or participate in a process that may in fact produce something different' (Sawicki, 2013: 84). Or in Foucault's classic formulation, we are made by power relations, but 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault, 1978: 95). This is an idea of freedom far from any transcendence, a subject outside history, but as a resistance to the powers that constitute us, as a practice of the possible within a given coercion (Ribas, 2017). The care of the self is the practicing of resistance 'that may, in time, destabilize and dismantle some power networks (...) we are always formed in networks of power and cannot directly oppose them. Instead, we must work within them to counter specific effects and at the same time transform ourselves' (McWhorter, 2013: 55). Freedom is never transcendent, but a reflective relation to the knowledges and powers that constitute a reality, a possible practice within these regimes and formed by these regimes. The care of the self, a care for our self, can lead us to practices of freedom and this freedom opens the possibility of bending the norms, rules, and definitions that impel us to define ourselves in particular ways. This means that -

[...] practices of freedom increase capacities while decreasing docility; developed capacities strengthen embodied individuals rather than disabling their resistance. Thus, practices of freedom help protect their practitioners from the damaging effects of oppressive forces but practices of freedom are also, and more importantly, transformative and creative (McWhorter, 2013: 70).

It seems to us that practices of freedom take place at the intersection between power and subjectivity. They can uncover and alter discursive and social-cultural power/knowledge regimes promoting new conditions of possibility for subjectivity, offering new positions for individuals who are seeking and fighting for their identities, including their gender identities, beyond existing configurations (Allen, 2011; Stewart, 2017).

This is also a way of thinking about ourselves, as academics with an interest in gender and organizing. Our intelligibility as organizational researchers is similarly framed by institutional structures and power relations, and this can normalize the binary knowledge produced about gender and diversity. If we instead formulate our own practices of freedom, this suggests that the knowledge we offer is ‘co-constructed through relations of power, and that constitute self and other; researcher and subject; and sameness and difference’ (Ahonen et al., 2014: 264). This is thinking *with*, a process that recognizes the ways in which ideas about organizing and gender are always already prefigured by binaries, as well as being opportunities for thinking across, between and together. Thinking *with* trans intends to problematize the binary of gender, and for organizational researchers this implies a form of critical thinking in the name of freedom because it can liberate us from ‘our attachment to present ways of thinking and doing’ (Sawicki, 2013: 75) for researchers and their subjects. We are the subjects too, and of course we are gendered too. This work, the work of trans organizing, of rethinking organization beyond binaries, has the potential to trouble the dominance of the present state of affairs, and assist (in a minor way) with the creation of other ways of understanding gender, and of living lives. Sawicki (2013: 85) affirms that there are ‘many different and creative ways in which people make their lives livable, even pleasurable and joyful, within the often intolerable and oppressive conditions in which they find themselves’. Thinking *with* trans explores the creative ways which trans people, non binary or not, search to make their lives livable within often intolerable and oppressive conditions, offering ‘them’ and ‘us’ the possibility of asking different questions.

Thinking *with* Trans

Intelligible binary gender categories are produced by regulatory practices that produce coherent identities and truths through hegemonic gender norms. Butler calls these norms the heterosexual matrix. For her, the heterosexualization of desire requires asymmetrical oppositions between feminine and masculine. Therefore, the internal unity and coherence of 'man' or 'woman' requires a stable and oppositional heterosexuality. This means that 'institutional heterosexuality both requires and produces the univocity of each of the gendered terms that constitute the limit of gendered possibilities within an oppositional, binary gender system' (Butler, 1990: 31). This kind of conception of gender 'presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire' (Butler, 1990: 31). The heterosexual matrix builds and organizes bodies exclusively as male or female. Body parts are linked to a natural and original masculinity and femininity because 'bodies are caught up within a severely limited heteronormative field of intelligibility' (Muhr *et al.*, 2016: 55). We will argue below that non-binary trans people are in conflict with heteronormativity and the cisnormative assumptions it relies upon. Because of their practice of trying to produce an intelligibility that challenges and disrupts gender norms it is important to think *with* them, not merely *about* them. They are the subject and object of their practices and, as academics with interests in this area, we must seek a similar relation.

Thinking *with* trans attempts to dissolve the binaries that hold 'us' and 'them' apart, starting by considering the knowledge produced by non-binary trans people as fundamental to rethinking subjection, power and freedom. This sort of critical reflection on the political dimensions implicit in everyday lives is aimed at making embodied power relations more explicit (Rigg, 2018: 151). Of course, considering that the practice of any subject position is exercised in relation to others, thinking *with* trans necessarily demands that we problematize the identities of cis subjects too. Thinking *with* trans disrupts the structural logic of 'us' *or* 'them', trans *or* cisgender, questioning the boundaries between different identities, affirming that identities simultaneously contain and constitute each other.

As we noted above, the potential of other sorts of TGNC people to disrupt gender norms has already been recognized (Connell, 2010; Muhr et al.; 2016; Schilt, 2006; Schilt and Connell, 2007; Schilt and Westbrook 2009; Thanem and Wallemborg, 2016). We wish to develop many of these ideas with particular reference to non-binary trans people. In order to do this, using the three part classification of ‘practices of freedom’ offered by Dey and Steyaert (2016), we suggest that O’Shea’s autoethnography is a sort of practice of problematization. In this critical reflection on hir work we undertake an exercise of thinking *with* O’Shea, considering hir practices as fundamental to rethinking subjection, power and freedom.

Practices of Problematization

Non-binary is a term that refers to a set of identities that do not reiterate the binary but attempt to overcome or bypass it. Non-binary people, enbee (also en-bee, enbie, enby and NB), or genderqueer is ‘A non-specific umbrella term referring to those who do not identify as one of the traditional gender identities on the traditional gender binary’ (Collins et al., 2015: 207). Such people ‘may identify as both male and female, neither male nor female, a fluid or fluctuating gender identity, without a gender (agender), or third gender/other gender’ (*op cit*). They do not (always) identify themselves within the binary of man or woman, though they might do for a time, instead performing gender (or lack of gender) in ways that would not be adequately represented by an either/or choice between ‘man’ or ‘woman’. Richards et al. (2017: 5) suggest that there are non-binary people ‘who identify as a single fixed gender position rather than male or female. There are those who have a fluid gender. There those who have no gender. And there are those who disagree with the very idea of gender’. For Brubaker, this means that non-binary trans people are somehow ‘beyond’ classification, suggesting that this is a practice which ‘involves positioning oneself in a space that is not defined with reference to established categories. It is characterized by the claim to transcend existing categories – or to transcend categorization altogether’ (2016: 10).

So what does it mean to transcend categorization? Dey and Steyaert’s use of Foucault is helpful to understand how we might think *with* trans in this way. In a paper on social entrepreneurs, they suggest that there are three different types of practices of freedom. In this paper we will concentrate on one of these - practices of ‘problematization’. The other

two categories suggested by Dey and Steyaert are practices of ‘reflective affirmation’, and practices of ‘relating’, but (for reasons of length and clarity of argument) we will not be considering those in this paper. Problematization is a process ‘whereby a certain field of experience or a set of practices is turned into a ‘problem’’, allowing the opening of ‘a space for change by dint of questioning what is taken for granted’ (Dey and Steyaert, 2016: 634). Practices of problematization have the potential to disrupt hegemonic regimes of gender power/knowledge. Through such practices non-binary trans people can enact a freedom that undermines and disrupts hegemonic conceptions of gender and subjectivity. However, this freedom is not an unconstrained choice. Possibility and agency do not have an existence outside the social but are renegotiated within a matrix of power precisely because the matrix itself brings possibilities of resistance. As Butler puts it, gender is a ‘mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized’ (Butler, 2004: 2).

It seems to us that non-binary trans people engage in practices of problematisation which disrupt and undermine a power regime, ‘creating the conditions under which they are not governed all that much’ (Dey and Steyaert, 2016: 633). They recast gender subjectivities in dress, speech, comportment and relations, exploring new ways to live their lives beyond these norms, demonstrating that an ethic is ‘not given a priori but is immanent in ongoing struggles related to becoming an ethical subject’ (Dey and Steyaert, 2016: 628). Non-binary people’s identities are largely unintelligible within the heterosexual matrix and, precisely because of that, are also deemed abject (Callis, 2014; Herek, 2002). O’Shea’s autoethnography suggests that hers is an identity which doesn’t fit into the discourse and hence which can articulate an immanent challenge to ‘gendered oppression in organizations and affirm a life beyond the harsh limits that gender can impose’ (Pullen et al., 2017: 105). Living a non-binary identity also brings with it, or demands, an agency through which individuals constitute themselves as a subject by reworking the discursive materials which are available to them. O’Shea exercises this practice of freedom by problematizing a field of power knowledge relations, seeking to change what is imposed on her as a form of subjectivity at a given historical moment. Ze exercises the practices of problematization by refusing to be captured by the ‘truth’ of a given historical system, that is, as with these new pronouns, refusing to be completely captured by the order of discourse (Ribas, 2017).

O'Shea's paper is a document of problematization and ze regards hirself neither male nor female. Hir work demonstrates how hard it is to have a liveable life in a binary hegemonic order which relies on a heterosexual matrix which reduces every body's possibilities to be subject to one of only two binary genders. Ze does not have a position to occupy in discursive order to become a viable subject. Or, as O'Shea puts it, 'I struggle with describing myself in a society and language that presumes that matrix and cisgender to be the normal state of affairs', because by '*identifying as non-binary I am officially erased in society*' (O'Shea, 2018: 3-4, 9). Ze engages in a practice of freedom by refusing to be defined by heteronormativity and its gender truths, refusing to be captured by the s/he discursive binary order (Ribas, 2017). We think that hir reflections on hir life are an example of the pain and possibility of a care of the self, a testing and shaping of existential limits and possibilities, a voluntary inservitude. As Foucault (1994b: 23) declared '*Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem*'. The care of the self through practices of problematization is exactly this capacity to exercise freedom by making our existence as subject into a question, not an assumption.

For Foucault, freedom is the refusal to naturalize knowledge, the refusal to assume common sense, to occupy established positions. O'Shea's practices of problematization document a form of work that seeks to expose the limits imposed by discourse on our ways of thinking, acting and being. If read attentively, it releases readers and researchers from the illusion that we develop ourselves freely based on our own reason and truth, and instead provokes an experience of estrangement from what once seemed natural (Ribas, 2017). Hir care of the self is a practice of resistance which can lead to practices of freedom, where freedom is understood as something that one thinks or does that violates conventional norms and definitions which impel us to define ourselves in particular ways. Freedom is a creative commitment to disrupting existing limits.

Despite the limitations and constraints of a heteronormative discursive regime, and of the likely readers of this journal, O'Shea's account of hir practices of problematisation is disruptive, both in the flesh and on the page, offering new possibilities for subjectivity and identity (Allen, 2011). Ze suggests new forms of existence by destabilizing the existing power/knowledge gender regime. This is a profound challenge to

heteronormativity, binary classification, and an opening for practices of freedom. As Dey and Steyaert put it 'Freedom thus encompasses a critical and creative engagement with normalizing approaches that outline how one is supposed to live and who one is supposed to be' (2016: 630). As we noted before, this is not a transcendent notion of freedom, not a liberation from all constraints, but a practice which shows how freedom must be understood as a resistance to the power relations that produce us as what we are. O'Shea shows that is possible, within a regime of power/knowledge, to dissolve the notion of the unitary and essential subject, disturbing and disrupting the notion of binary gender.

This different space for organizing, trans organizing, is 'a place of sexual and gender fluidity, a space where identities can change, multiply, and/or dissolve' (Callis, 2014: 64). But this place is social, not individual, and hence requires some form of recognition in the discourse in order to become a signifier for a viable and intelligible subject. In part, this is about developing new language - such as the pronouns 'hir' or 'per', 'ze', 'zir', the title 'mx' and so on. However, the non-binary is not the end of categorisation, as if power/knowledge could be escaped altogether, but a resignification and creation of new subjectivities. But neither does it have an 'end' as a strategy that could ever be fully accomplished, and which itself could never change. O'Shea's living and writing involves 'forming a practice rather than some finite state', because freedom can never be 'fully realized nor fully suppressed, as it is subject to ongoing struggles around subjectivity' (Dey and Steyaert, 2016: 630). Hir non-binary trans organizing affirms this ongoing struggle to reorganize gender through a process of embodied resistance, a practice of making space for freedom.

The hijras in India, muxes in Mexico, fa'afafine in Samoa, berdache for some native American people are (amongst many others) examples of the enduring existence of non-binary gender categories. For example, the hijras non-binary gender culture stretches back 4000 years, a long time prior to the biopolitical heterosexual binary of European cultures of the last few hundred years. But this should not be taken as evidence to naturalise a third sex either, to prove it with orientalizing evidence, rather to demonstrate that being 'non-binary' is a very heterogeneous identity, and that gender 'as it is lived, embodied, experienced, performed, and encountered, is more complex and varied than can be accounted for by the currently dominant binary sex/gender ideology of Eurocentric modernity' (Stryker, 2006: 3). These various examples of non-binary forms of gender,

past and present, demonstrate that the performance of gender is shaped by specific power relations embedded in local histories. As O'Shea evidences, being enbee is not an unified category with a single organizing principal. As we will now discuss in our conclusion, this highlights the need to consider the relationship between thought and binary forms of intelligibility at the same time that we accept the inevitability, even perhaps the necessity, of power/knowledge regimes.

Reflections

I don't believe there can be a society without relations of power [...]. The problem is not of trying to dissolve them [...], but to give one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination (Foucault, 1984a: 18).

For Foucault, practices of freedom necessarily involve a critical attitude. This means 'avoiding being governed in a particular way and in the name of certain principles. Such insubordination concerning specific points, but fundamental in the constitution of our daily life, is the mark of its politics in the destabilization of hegemonic knowledge' (Ribas, 2017: 191, our translation). O'Shea exercises this critical attitude, in practice and theory, by rejecting heteronormative governmental rationality and demonstrating alternative subject relations to truths about gender. This means developing new ways to organize gender - 'trans organization' - which destabilises binary hegemonic knowledge through reflective problematisation.

For some time now, critical organization studies has sought to problematise gender binarism, often by using the possibilities of post-structural thought (Ashcraft and Muhr, 2018; Bowring, 2004; Brewis et al., 1997; Knights and Tullberg, 2012; Knights, 2015; Pullen et al., 2017). We think that these academic attempts to think past dualisms are given material expression in the practices of non-binary trans people who engage in practices of freedom that demonstrate the fluidity and heterogeneity of gender identities, affirming a non-essentialist notion of difference thinking *with* their own exploration of trans. Non-binary people who resist the discursive norms related to gender are pushing against the limits of regimes of power, refusing their abjection, engaging in practices of freedom which create possibilities to make their lives liveable. But, in case we essentialise

non-binary trans people as some sort of romantic or outsider category, the variety of non-binary practices also demonstrates that a non-binary subjectivity is much more complex and variable than any simple category. In this sense, it is important to understand that the practices of freedom performed by non-binary people do not only shape who ‘they’ are, but also who ‘we’ all are. Practices of freedom are a hazardous transformation of the self that is inseparable from the transformation of others, from the power knowledge relations that constitute any and all social categories. If gender is fluid, then other elements of the self might be fluid too, including that of the academic who exists through writing about others, writing on others, not with others. In that sense, thinking *with* trans keeps open Foucault’s (1994c) question about who we are today, how we came to be this, and how we might be different.

The gender binary, as well as other forms of power knowledge, operates on bodies to limit the intelligibilities of embodied gender identities (Knights, 2015). Structures, discourses, are ways to produce both intelligibility and un-intelligibility, that which can be assumed and that which breaks the code. Non-binary trans people, through their heterogenous practices of freedom, creatively violate, challenge and disrupt the effects of power and knowledge. They demonstrate how gender can be lived, embodied, experienced, and performed in ways that exceed the currently dominant binary sex/gender configuration of Eurocentric modernity (Stryker, 2006). It is important to stress that this is a lived practice, a form of everyday ethics and experiment, not a strategic attempt to overturn an oppressor by making explicit demands. Indeed, a conscious oppositional criticism of gender binary limitations can sometimes leave such dualist demands reproduced in everyday lives, and certainly in academic writing (Knights, 2015). In this sense, non-binary practices of freedom offer to organization studies, and perhaps to organizations too, the possibility of challenging and disrupting binary norms when we think *with* trans, when we think transitively. Thinking *with* trans might encourage the emergence of a new gender intelligibility, becoming at the same time a practical way of making the lives of non-binary people liveable. Thinking *with* trans is also a way to value previously abject knowledges, representing the detail of everyday practices rather than producing categories to be struggled against, or for.

Of course it is worth noting that the majority of authors in the field who have researched and written about TGNC people are not themselves transgender nonconforming people.

This suggests that in an embodied way they are not writing *with* trans, but *about* trans, and hence perhaps that their accounts might be less relevant to TGNC people's lives (O'Shea, 2019). Further to that, as organizational researchers mostly working within organizations, our intelligibility is framed by binary institutional structures about gender. This means that any attempt to think *with* trans is a reflective attitude that is aimed at a different form of thought and writing, not that it can easily be achieved simply by claiming it. Thinking *with* trans disrupts the ontoepistemological logic of 'us' or 'them', trans or cisgender, problematising in a reflexive way the boundaries between different identities, declaring that identities simultaneously contain and constitute each other. This rests on a declaration that researcher and subject are co-constructs of the knowledge produced (Ahonen et al., 2014), thinking across, between, and together. It offers the possibility of thinking differently, partly releasing from certain demands and instead offering a form of co-production which dethrones the cis academic (the academic who can only ever recognize themselves as an 'academic') as the source of expertise. This is a reflective attitude which could practically help to develop a dialogue with TGNC people and associations and make their lives liveable, acting with trans. It is also an attitude that invites to rethink the identity of the academic, together with the organizations that they make and that make them.

As a non-binary trans person, O'Shea does not identify as the male which was assigned at birth and does not seek to fit hir body to this intelligibility. 'I was never a man and will not become a woman' (O'Shea, 2018: 8). This is not only a challenge to the gender binary, but also to the idea of a settled third sex of non-binary. Given the complex and multiple ways which non-binary trans people engage in care of the self and embody ethics we propose that it is necessary to avoid an essentialist conception of non-binary identities too. A less structuralist, more fluid intelligibility is necessary to avoid 'taming' such identities, even within generous classifications such as the five offered by Collins et al. above (2015). To avoid this, we think that the practices of non-binary trans people should be understood as a recognition-based form of organizing that embodies ethics, resistance, and political activism against binary heteronormativity in the situated contexts in which they perform gender. This trans organizing, organizing across and beyond dualisms, demonstrates the capacity of non-binary trans people to rearrange gender in different and complex ways, and through this process to embody resistance, creating new ways of organizing gender beyond the either/or.

In theoretical terms, to think of transorganizing (not only trans organizing) encourages us to understand organization as a verb, not a noun, a process and not an outcome. As Author (2001) argued about queer, queering organization is not the same as producing an organization for queers. Neither, we think, is transorganizing only about making organizations hospitable to trans people. It is a larger transitive project, something that requires that we think organization as movement. This is not a new insight, and we find it in much work that is influenced by poststructuralist and process philosophy, such as the early work of Robert Cooper (see Burrell and Parker 2016). For Cooper, organization was always entangled with disorganization, two concepts which required each other to exist at all, and were always in a state of ‘becoming’. In terms of gender, Acker (1990) and Baines (2010) have proposed that gender identities are forms of organization. It seems to follow then that transorganization theory would explore the ways that gendered performances do not need to be understood as limited to the reproduction of hegemonic gender identities that rest on the intelligibility of the normal and the natural. Of course this is not limited to gender but could concern the practice of non-hegemonic identities – of many different forms - as producing new ways to organize, ways to assemble differences that have productive effects (Tyler 2019). Transorganizing highlights the ongoing process of organization and disorganization of gendered and other identities that shapes the practice and experience of organization itself. In this sense transorganization gestures towards the ongoing, always incomplete, struggle to organize and reorganize gender through a process of embodied power and resistance. Normatively and theoretically, the concept of transorganizing suggests that we could organize gender and other identities across and beyond dualisms, rearrange ourselves differently, organizing gender beyond the either/or, producing new subjectivities, and perhaps new ways to make lives liveable.

As Butler (1993a) claimed about the term queer, we think that this means that ‘non-binary’ signifies a site of collective and historical contestation and its meaning needs to stay open and undetermined to retain its political potential. The very category ‘is to be a site of collective contestation, [...] it will have to remain that which is in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes’ (Butler, 1993a: 19). In order to promote practices of freedom in organization studies we must enable difference and

variety, rather than homogenizing and stabilizing discursive categories. Thinking *with* trans, thinking trans organization and transorganization, is a way to encourage critical thought and new ways of living within contemporary regimes of power/knowledge, encouraging new forms of care of the self. If lives like Saoirse Caitlin O'Shea's are not to be foreclosed, then freedom needs to be understood as an endless practice, not a state.

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