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*Transsexualism and psychoanalytic perspectives: gender theories  
and clinics*

*Transsessualismo e prospettive psicoanalitiche: teorie di genere e  
cliniche*

#### *Abstract*

Questo lavoro ha l'obiettivo di analizzare i percorsi sviluppati dalla psicoanalisi sul transsessualismo e sul transgenderismo, guardando all'evoluzione dei paradigmi teorici e alle riflessioni cliniche su questi temi. L'exkursus mette in luce i radicali cambiamenti che si sono verificati tra gli anni Novanta e il nuovo secolo negli atteggiamenti in ambito psicoanalitico verso il transsessualismo e la clinica dell'identità di genere. Specificamente, l'analisi si focalizzerà sulle ragioni storiche e metapsicologiche implicate nel cambiamento in una direzione sempre meno stigmatizzante e giudicante da parte della psicoanalisi, attualmente maggiormente in grado di dare più spazio all'unica esperienza soggettiva delle persone transessuali e transgender. In questo percorso di transizione, un ruolo fondamentale è stato giocato dalla psicoanalisi relazionale e dal paradigma lacaniano. L'articolo vuole analizzare come nella psicoanalisi il focus si sia spostato progressivamente dal costrutto di genere ad una nuova concettualizzazione sulla relazione tra corpo, mente e cultura. In conclusione, il transsessualismo e il transgenderismo sono divenuti uno stimolo per il dibattito psicoanalitico che ha sviluppato nuove teorie sulla questione della sessuazione e dell'emergenza del genere.

Parole chiave: psicoanalisi, transsessualismo, transgenderismo, teoria queer, corpo-mente.

#### *Abstract*

This paper aims at analysing the pathways developed by psychoanalysis about transsexualism and transgenderism, looking at the evolution of theoretical paradigms and clinical reflections on these issues. The excursus puts in light the radical changes occurred

in the psychoanalytic attitude towards transsexualism and gender identity clinics between the nineties and the new century. Specifically, the analysis will focus on the historical and meta-psychological reasons involved in the development of an increasingly non-stigmatising and non-judging attitude in psychoanalysis, now more able to give room to the unique subjective experience of transsexual and transgender people. In this transition pathway, a fundamental role has been played by relational psychoanalysis and the Lacanian paradigm.

Such excursus highlights how the focus of psychoanalysis shifts from the construct of gender to new conceptualisations about the relationships between body, mind and culture. Eventually, transsexualism and transgenderism became a stimulus for a psychoanalytic debate which produced new theories about the issue of sexuation and gender emergence.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, transsexualism, transgenderism, queer theory, mind-body issue

#### Introduction: sex and gender's genealogies

Human beings have tried from the beginnings of time to define and explain the conundrum of sexual difference. Two different genesis can be described: *at the very beginning*, there was only one sex which declined itself among people. It was solely differentiated by an issue: it could extend outside and become a penis, or it could develop deep inside and be called vagina. This is the Galenian account of sexuation: one signifier, the phallus, represents and explains the two, apparent, sexes. Otherwise, we can have a completely different version of this "*at the very beginning*" and it is possible to describe it so: *once upon a time* there was only *one* androgynous body (or a large amount of "*one-bodies*"), a bisexual body, which was cut off in two pieces by the will and the words of a jealous Zeus, that is the Platonic account. The first theory would have eventually given foundation to many models explaining the biology of generation and reproduction; the second one, instead, puts in light the logic of desire in human beings. It is easy to recognise that these are philosophical and pre-scientific myths. Of course, the Platonic and Galenian accounts pertain to a pre-scientific era, and nowadays' sexology and endocrinology seem to provide a full scientific theory. Despite this, in a psychoanalytic

perspective, these myths continue to function unconsciously (Lacan, 2011; Laqueur, 1990).

It is possible to individuate a turning point in Western culture about these themes, and it can be historically located at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century, the same period which sees the dawn of psychoanalysis. This new science meant to include the new field of sexuality into the knowledge apparatus. In this phase, the original One (sex or sex' signifier) is *split* into the Two (sexes). In fact, from 18<sup>th</sup> century animal and human bodies are cut into two categories, as finally expressed by the Lineic taxonomisation of vegetal world. These two categories (man and woman) implicate two different ontological (not only social) statuses (Laqueur, 1990). Despite this, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud, 1905) testifies the simultaneous survival of the two old theories: in Freud's account original bisexuality is structural in subjects exactly as the differentiation brought by the Oedipus and castration complex (Platonic side). In this direction, Freud elaborates the notion of psychosexuality to show how our sexuality is deeply embedded with sexuality, as it has been articulated in the infantile sexual stages analysed in *Three Essays*. To complicate the matter, Freud argues that there is no sexual difference in the libido (the energy of drives): the libido can only be masculine or, better, it could be masculine if we would know what masculine and feminine are (and this is quite impossible, Freud says to us in footprint 14 in *Three Essays*) (Galenian side). As Dimen

& Goldner (2011), D'Ercole (2014) and Hodges (2011) significantly pointed out, Freud is theoretically trapped inside two different trends. In fact, from one side he, influenced by contemporary culture, still continues to incapsulate masculinity and femininity in a binary way; from the other, instead, he destructures the overlap of the couple activity-passivity with that of masculinity and femininity (as in *On Femininity*, 1932) and criticises the supposed normalcy of heterosexual sex. The two-faced Freudian account of sexuality reveals itself also through the use of the concept of anatomy: in *Three Essays*

Freud (1905) states, quoting Napoleon, that "anatomy is destiny", letting the reader erroneously think to a sexuation biologised vision. Despite this, twenty years later, Freud will move the attention and the focus on the psychical (and therefore, symbolical) consequences of the anatomical distinction between sexes (Freud, 1925). But there is a deep difference between every pre-Freudian theory and the Freud's account of sexuality. The psychoanalyst, in fact, does not aim to define the nature of human sexuality, but he attempts to describe the unconscious elements at work in the definition of the *infantile theories* (Freud, 1923) about sexuality. In his perspective, every sexual theory is marked

by infantile experiences and infantile unconscious phantasies about sex and sexuality. This can be seen as a refusal to assert the last word about sexuality and the beginning of a new kind of investigation: “*how can sex and sexuality work in our lives the strange and unnatural way it does?*”. Freudian discovery about the emergency of the unconscious infantile attributions and theorisations about sex is an indispensable element of psychoanalytic theory and that every kind of sex and gender account is unconsciously affected by the infantile theories. Not only the old pre-scientific theories are involved in this unconscious effect: cultural, psychoanalytic, biopsychosocial and even biological theories (as accurately showed in different ways by Laqueur, 1990; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Haraway, 1991) are not free from the deeply rooted infantile theories. In a Freudian perspective, there is no possibility to produce an objective abstraction of sexuality and gender differences without involving the ways sex and gender work upon us unconsciously (Freud, 1905; 1923; 1925).

In this paper “transsexualism” has been preferred for historical and conceptual reasons, attempting to maintain an adherence to the development of lexicon in literature. First of all, transsexualism is the one of the definition more common in psychoanalytical literature from Lacan and Stoller’s seminal writings (1950-1960) until today, while there is a lesser preference for other lemmas as gender identity disorder and gender dysphoria, mainly used, by authors, for defining children’s conducts in the 90’s decade. Furthermore, we preferred transsexualism because is a word which fits better in regard to the psychoanalytical account, historically more concerned about sex, sexual difference and sexuality than gender issues. We, of course, do not aim at diminishing other important and nowadays more used words as transgenderism and queer, and we will follow the “linguistic” evolution of psychoanalysis within gender issues, adopting queer and transgender to show how psychoanalysis converged with other perspectives and began to accept in its theory and clinical practice complex and contingent subjectivities.

This paper aims at analysing psychoanalytic literature about transsexualism looking at two different but reciprocally influencing sides: metapsychology and clinics. Even though it is important to be aware of the embedded relationship between metapsychology and clinics, constitutively related in psychoanalytical epistemology, this approach made it possible to destructure and highlight the different paths and reflections developed in the psychoanalytic framework.

## Transsexualism and gender theories in psychoanalysis

Transsexualism in 60s' psychoanalytical literature as a puzzle, impossible to solve, and one of the first aims of psychoanalysts was to find and describe the pieces of this uncanny medical-made picture, so similar, in their original perspective, to Franksteins, Golems (Czermak, 1986; Argentieri, 2009). Analysing the representation of transsexualism in psychoanalysis can be useful both for analysing the way it produces theories from the clinics, but also to shed light on some processes of normativisation and stigma which characterised psychoanalysis during the last century. Whilst the first misrepresentation of transsexualism was Freud's interpretation of President Schreber, which strongly influenced a stigmatized vision of transsexual people as psychotic although Freud did not define him that way, the real first psychoanalyst devoted to the study of transsexualism was Robert Stoller (1968), colleague of Harry Benjamin, author of *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966). Stoller introduced in psychoanalysis the orthogonal dimensions of sex and gender to substitute the Freudian name for sex, *Geschlecht* (Freud, 1905). Otherwise, it could be impossible (in American psychoanalysis) to justify the transsexual phrase: a female soul (gender) trapped inside a male body (sex). The Oedipus complex begins to lose his fundamental role in structuring sexual identities, the pre-oedipal infant-mother dyad instead becomes central in articulating subjectivities. And in this developmental phase Stoller (1968) postulates that a proto-feminine core gender identity emerges in child. The child (mainly male) will have a developmental task: "choose" to disidentify from mother and enter the virile world or to remain in a symbiotic-fusional and without-conflict relationship with mother. This second pathway is the one which will lead the child in the transsexual condition (Greenson, 1966; Stoller, *ibid.*). Stoller proposes, inside his biopsychosocial approach, a psychodynamic component which mainly entails the notions of identity and identification (Stoller, 1968). The pivotal element of his account, anyway, was the a-conflictual emergence of this condition, in open opposition towards a psychoanalytic world where conflict was the basic key concept. Stoller's contribution is extremely interesting, not only because he had the possibility to collect a large amount of data and clinical cases, but also because his work testifies the effort to produce a new, non-Freudian, metapsychology: transsexualism itself seems to be a wayward exception to the classical tripartition of diagnoses in Freud (neurosis, psychosis, perversion). Briefly, neither conflict nor splitting (the two basic mechanisms retrieved in Ego-Psychology tradition) can be found in Stoller's account of transsexualism. Reactions from the American Ego-Psychology were sudden: the meta-psychologic element which divided the American debate was the presence or the

absence of conflict in emergence of transsexuals' symptomatology. In any case, this "pathological" condition could come out only from a conflict. Ovesey and Person (1974) are the most representative psychoanalyst of this theoretic line and they found the specific conflict of the "transsexualist child" in Mahler's individuation-separation phase. Anyway, their gender theory assumes that both boys and girls develop primarily a sense of their own gender, prior to sexual identity's development (Ovesey & Person, 1983). If in Stoller's aetiology, a persistent proto-femininity in boys is the layer permitting the emergence of "transsexualism", for Ovesey and Person (1983) core gender identity in these subjects is basically ambiguous. The French debate followed completely different rules and was marked by the figure of Jacques Lacan, who met dysphoric and transsexual patients in his clinical work in Saint Anne psychiatric hospital. For the specific target of his dysphoric patients, mainly encountered inside the psychiatric institutions, Lacan could not avoid underlining the psychotic structure of transsexual people, caused, in his account, by the forclusion of the Name-of-Father and the operativity of the signifier ~~The~~ Woman (Schreber and his *pousse-à-la-femme* became in fact a cornerstone of the seminar) (Lacan, 1981). The diagnosis of psychosis will be followed also by some first Lacan's disciples (Safouan, 1974; Millot, 1989). Lacan's account of sexuality has its own peculiarities. In fact, for Lacan, the destiny of subjectivation is extremely embedded with the ways the subject elaborates and phantasises sex and sexuality (like Freudian *infantile theories*): in this way subjectivation is also sexuation, the singular and unique way each subject assumes his/her own sexuality or posits him/herself in reference to sex. In fact, Lacan's subject is a subject (also with the meaning of subjugated) of unconscious, continuously written by the operativity of (even and mainly sexual) signifiers inscribed in the unconscious (Nicotra, 2019). It is beyond our scope showing precisely the Lacanian logics and table of sexuation (Lacan, 2005; 2011), but we want to shed light upon some structural features. In Lacan's account of subject and sexuation, there are two foundational dimensions or fields: desire and *jouissance*. Subjects are, in fact, absorbed inside the dialectic with the Other and the Symbolic: the drives become the original matter which transforms in desire, articulated within language and built by it. What remains outside of the Symbolic, for Lacan is the *jouissance*, which is placed the register of Real, defined by the French analyst as the hard, non-symbolisable kernel of subject. For Lacan (2011), sexuation is not a fact of anatomical sex or psychosocial gender; instead, in his account, what that really matters is how subjects place themselves, their *jouissance* and desire, in relation to some logical elements. So, when Lacan talks about "masculine side"

or “feminine side” he is not actually talking about biological men and women, or some essentialist or archetypical feature of maleness and femaleness, but he is talking about possible position and articulation of subject (an asexuated variable  $x$ ), regardless his/her anatomy or sexual orientation (Lacan, 2011; Ragland-Sullivan, 2004; Nicotra, 2019).

In the nineties, instead, queer theory and transgender movements begin to push on psychoanalytical and psychological institutions, while relational psychoanalysis, after Self-Psychology, supersedes definitively Ego-Psychology paradigm in United States. Gender, which, mainly thanks to the Stollerian concept of “core gender identity”, found in psychoanalysis a central theoretical articulation, comes into a process of fragmentation and decentralisation. Gender loses his binary characterisation and shows his paradoxical being as “authentic fiction”. In nineties’ postmodern and post-structuralist climate, essentialism and naturality of gender begin to lose their theoretical relevance, whilst the coextensivity of sexuality and power is powerfully shown by queer theorisations, following Foucault’s intuitions (Foucault, 1976) (and, in fact, in Butler’s reflections the production of desire inside power relationships precedes the emergence of gender, 1990, 1993). Queer theory can be considered as a tension towards the overturn of gender binary, inside a perspective which aims to link the private dimension of subjectivity with the political side of it (Haraway, 1991; Butler, 1990; 1993). In these epistemological contexts the Trueness of Gender begins to fall and show as a fiction (Butler, 1993). In relational psychoanalysis, the concept of gender is deconstructed in a post-modern way from the nineties (Goldner, 2003; Kassoff, 2004; Harris, 2005). Also, Lacanian psychoanalysts abandon the old unitary (or binary) view of gender. They push their theoretical account claiming that basically unconscious does not know gender (Ozlan, 2008; Gherovici, 2010). In fact, gender is located as an Imaginary effect in subjectivation, a sort of peel (Lacan, 2006; Gherovici, 2010), which can fall off from the subject’s body. In this direction both relational and Lacanian psychoanalysts tend to insist to the role of constitutive and structural (even universal) trauma between body and language (cultural factors) which provokes a *Spaltung*/dissociation in the emergence of subjectivity. Saketopoulou (2011; 2014) introduces the notion of gender massive trauma, and his articulation through body and gender; in her own words: “*a clinical syndrome arising at the onerous intersection of the misgendering of transgender patients and the subjective, anguished experience of the natal body*” (Saketopoulou, 2014 p. 773). Despite the presence of many theories of trauma, it’s important to be careful to respect the several narrations and counter-narrations of

transsexualism/genderism (including and underlining the role of autobiographic novels, as highlighted by Gherovici (2010) which must be respected and introduced as counterpart in meta-psychological and clinical logics. If something could be said about the radical change in theoretical view of gender, and so of transsexualism, is that the body, previously vanished behind the psycho-social and constructivist account of gender, returns in the scene of debate. Embodiment becomes central in the relationship between subject and gender. As Gherovici (2010; 2017) points out. “Gender needs to be embodied; sex needs to be symbolized” (2010 p. 247). Anyway, it must be observed that there is a difference between the theoretical de-pathologisation of relational psychoanalysis and that of Lacanian psychoanalysis. In fact, if in relational psychoanalysis it is possible to retrieve a phenomenon of progressive queering (Kassoff, 2004), in which psychoanalysis abandons old concepts to assume more post-modern and queer notions (as fluidity and performativity), Lacanian psychoanalysis, instead, utilises some typically psychoanalytical concepts, as *jouissance* and *Sinthome*, in a less stigmatizing and a more flexible way, to finally recognize some convergences between queer and trans world and psychoanalytical “results”.

Also the clinical side passes through great changes. In fact, in psychoanalysis (also for its peculiar epistemological constitution) theoretical changes and shifts in clinical approaches proceed almost simultaneously, influencing each other. With an analogy coming from literature’s forms, we can classify the cases from sixties to nineties as like 18<sup>th</sup> century’s English *bildungsroman* (they recall Dickens’ protagonists’ stories). The psychoanalyst’s voice, guided by the sexual difference (Chiland, 2000; 2009), is the narrating voice who wisely knows the true and right pathway of the young and disoriented boy. There are uncanny analogies and similarities within all these cases and one of the most prominent is the use of Ken and Barbie as transitional objects and play objects in therapy with dysphoric children (as Loeb, 1992; Haber, 1991; McDevitt, 1995). Also, the first recorded transsexual case in history, the Lance’s case, narrated by Greenson (1966), who defined him *a transvestite boy*, and Stoller (1968), shows the first use of these hyper-gendered dolls (but also profoundly de-sexualised, missing of genitalia). The first psychoanalysts proposed reparative therapies: the transsexual boy had to find in his, mostly male, therapist an identificatory figure to disidentify from his mother (Greenson, 1966). As Barkai (2017) significantly pointed out in his paper upon psychoanalytic clinical approaches to Gender Identity Disorder (GID) and Gender Dysphoria (GD), the



main theoretical focus of these therapeutic processes was gender as something modifiable by the phallic presence of the analyst.

With the new century, a new literary genre begins to spread in “gender variant” clinical cases: the reports are no more rigid *bildungsroman*: rather they become postmodern diaries where analysts’ and patients’ thoughts and words mix and dialogue (Offman, 2014; Suchet, 2011; Winograd, 2014). This new approach is not detached from activists’ movements and fights, and from the emergence of a new “paradigm”, transgenderism as a way to perform gender in a unique way, and the deep connections it has with queer theory.

Transgenderism<sup>1</sup> tends to shake gender binarism and heteronormativity more than transsexualism actually did, the latter implicating structurally the passage from one sex to another (maintaining somehow the sexual difference). Hence a new kind of therapy, based upon clinical tools inspired by Winnicott, as mirroring (Lemma, 2015), makes its dawn inside psychoanalytical setting: psychoanalysts are no more interested in fixing patient’s gender but they aim to mirror back to the analysands their true gender-self (trans-or cis-gender), in order to give patients the possibility to symbolise it as a part of the self (Lemma, 2015; Ehrensaft, 2009; 2014).

Only with new century, gender begins to become no more an ideological battlefield where patient and analyst propose a completely different path and account of gender, but a transitional space where the therapeutic dyad can play with the issues of body, sexuality and desire at a psychical, symbolic and, therefore, metaphorical level (Gherovici, 2010; 2017). The (engendered) embodiment (Elliot, 2001; Salamon, 2010), the symbolisation of own’s body (which is a universal traumatic developmental task), is brought to the centre of the therapeutic process. This way, several possible pathways (Lemma, 2015) are considered in order to co-create a contingent therapeutic path.

Recent contributions show the effort to reintroduce the relevance of body in emergence of subject and, consequently, of gender identity. The Lacanian Sinthome, for example, represents the creative act of subject, which keeps the subject’s unity and knots him, has been considered as a useful clinical and theoretical tool to grasp transsexualism and to work with it in a non-stigmatising way (Hubert, 2007; Gherovici, 2010; 2017; Cavanagh, 2018; Lemma, 2018); in fact, following the logic of Sinthome, Nicotra (2019) defines the experience of trans\* people as a “*trans/singular invention*”. “If transgenderism is not

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<sup>1</sup> We use transgenderism in his “etymological” sense of something that is *trans* the genders, rather than with the use more diffuse today of umbrella term gathering each form of gender non-conforming or queer subjectivity.

pathological, then a sex change should not be considered either a treatment or a cure. Some transsexual discourses and practices are significant insofar as they inscribe sexual difference without the usual reference to the phallus.” (Gherovici, 2010 p. 246). Psychoanalysis can work as a support to the patient’s choice, in front of the complex path of hormonal and surgical transition, respecting the wide spectrum of possibilities conceivable by the subject. An important contribution to de-stigmatization and de-pathologization comes also from Drescher’s reflections on gender diagnoses (Drescher, 2010; 2015). In fact, the author aims at modifying, in a psychoanalytic perspective, to move from a gender identity disorder and gender dysphoria paradigm to a less stigmatizing gender variance model. Moreover, he showed as the clinician’s countertransference can be influenced by “gender policy in the clinical setting” derived from heteronormative and cisgender models, which the analyst should consider in his/her practice (Drescher, 2015). In this sense, transgender analysts, as Jack Pula (2015) and Griffith Hansbury (2011), testify a point of psychoanalytical breakthrough towards a better understanding about these issues, and the collapse of traditional walls between the institutionalised role of the healthy and “phallic” analyst and the transgender patient: “The ongoing destructive notion that transgender people are inherently abnormal, perverse, and psychotic is an epistemological problem that warrants scrutiny and correction in the field of psychoanalysis.” (Pula, 2015 p. 821).

#### The survival of dualisms: sex vs. gender/body vs. mind

When, in the incipit, we were talking about One and Two in sex and gender’s theories, we aimed to show two theoretical streams, often and unconsciously complementary. The 20<sup>th</sup> century’s split of sex and gender gave way to the deconstruction of the discursive production of desire, sexuality and, eventually, of the socio-symbolic elements of gender (Butler, 1990; 1993). This split permits us to see the coexistence of hidden levels in the field of sex and sexuality. At the same time, this split had a side effect: as Joan Copjec (2012) and Zupančič (2012; 2017) pointed out, gender has *neutered* sex; it has extracted sex (sexuality) from sex producing on one side the gender as the preeminent, psychosocial, element, on the other side the sex as the biological and hormonal features (including chromosomal inheritance) and, eventually, the sexual practices as remains. From an initial de-structuralization of these constructs, academic literature rapidly provided a reification of sex and gender. But this split (or dualism) has a nobler ancestor, also known as the dualism body-mind. The body (the real bearer of sex) is the repressed

element, which can revive only when accurately rendered in a discursive and biologised way. Its drives (and if we want to stay in a Freudian account, we must admit many of them as sexual drives) are neutered and translated into an acceptable and unambiguous language. That is the thing: both these splits derive from the same exigence of putting the body as the reifiable object which can be divided, defined (*gestaltised*) and, finally, controlled. In this way, the medicalised and anatomical body can emerge, exactly as the biological and hormonal sex. In recent psychoanalytical clinics of transgenderism and transsexualism exactly the issue of body is becoming a theoretical *strange attractor* (Harris, 2005) bringing back different authors and psychoanalysts to the materiality of flesh. This is testified by several important and original contributions' titles (coming from different disciples and approaches), as *Minding the Body* (Lemma, 2015), *Assuming a Body* (Salamon, 2010) or *Sexing the Body* (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). But, if body is returned in the stage of theoretical and therapeutic issues, its position is always that of object (also at the level of enunciation). A body cannot assume, mind or sex, but you can mind it, assume it, sex it. This is exactly the logic that could be subverted, in a Freudian (and, then, psychoanalytic) way. The fact is that *the body minds*, in two different senses. From one side it permits the emergence of thought from body turmoil (Bion, 1962; Matte Blanco, 1975; Lombardi, 2016), from the other it has an its own operative knowledge that is repressed but working. In the same way, the body erogenous zones are the transitional spaces to "think" *jouissance* and sexuality (but also "modes of thoughts). So, in Freudian account, the bedrock for consciousness, thought and Ego is primarily the body. Such body is not an animal or a simply biological one; it is always a body modified, constructed and written by culture, language and nurture. Everyone is marked by their specific and language-mediated relationship with their own body. In a certain way, also transsexualism (at least in clinics) may show a body that does not work (match) properly, exactly as trans lives testify unique, new and creative attempts to re-think and transform their relationship to body (Lemma, 2018). It is not surprising that psychoanalysis introduced the distinctions between sex and gender for transsexualism: the first operative results were those of changing surgically the body to realign it with gender, the preminent level. But this is exactly the point questioned by transgenderism, where invasive bodily transformations are not necessarily requested to permit an idiosyncratic and free subjectivation and the subject can find "its" *gendered* path also by changing and modifying gender elements than rather the flesh.

## Conclusion

Transgenderism introduces a further complexity, not admitting as the only solution reducing these particular (*queer*) and potentially infinite processes of subjectivation to the necessity to realign surgically, in some way stereotypically, sex and gender. This context opens up to the necessity of a dialectics between psychoanalytical clinics and the complexity of the contemporary reflection upon identity, in fact today's psychoanalyst can also meet the presence of (bio)political issues on their couch.

In this direction, analysts as Shanna Carlson (2010) and Sheila Cavanagh (2018) try to link some Lacanian conceptualizations to trans\* studies, showing how so different theoretical paths can find a new space of convergence around non-stigmatizing notions or issues. Transsexualism in psychoanalysis, in fact, not only opened to a reading of these phenomena through the lens of "sex and gender": it also substantially contributed to an understanding, among the psychoanalytic community, of body as a place where different dimensions encounter and not as only a biological surface; and, most of all, as home of the unconscious drives that silently (but not quietly) dominate over us. In this direction, Claire Nahon (2003; 2006) and Sheila Cavanagh (2018) individuate a strong relationship between the subjectivity of the transsexual person and a condition of continuous metamorphosis and transformation both in body and mind ("*la transsexualité*"), extremely linked to the polymorphous perverse boy (Nahon, 2003; 2006) and to an original matrixial and Real space of transformation of drives (Cavanagh, *ib.*), which in transsexual people would remain over time. This dimension shows what Zupančič (2012) defines, reflecting upon sex in Freud-Lacanian psychoanalysis, "the point of ontological inconsistency, which, as such, is irreducible" (p. 3). An attempt to explain figuratively this is:

Sexuality does not fall into two parts; it does not constitute a one. It is stuck between "no longer one" and "not yet two (or more)"; it revolves around the fact that "the other sex doesn't exist" (which is to say that the difference is not ontologizable), yet there is more than one (which is also to say, "more than multiple ones"). (Zupančič, 2012 p. 9)

Therefore, sex (gender etc.) is something ungraspable with theoretical or ontological tools: Zupančič's words seem to tell us that it is not even a matter of changing account by passing from a modern (unitary or binary) perspective on sex and gender to a new postmodern account where gender is fragmented and multiplied. Rather she seems to suggest that the extraordinary, uncanny and universal (although not natural) strength of

sex, as an undefinable and unnameable region of being, someway simultaneously internal and external to being itself, should be taken in charge as a psychoanalytical cornerstone. The abandonment of rigid and crystallised theories of gender (or sex & gender) could bring the practitioners to *hold* gender and bodies as transitional spaces where the same analysts' gender categories could be modified by the encounter with emerging subjectivities. In this direction, psychoanalysis can recognise the sense of working with a community of subjects who claim not only the right of choosing upon their body, but also a political subjectivity and "identity".

#### Conflict of interest

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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