

Beyond Recognition and Intersectionality: Trans and the Politics of Becoming

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The proposal to enshrine “gender identity” and “gender expression” within the Criminal Code and the Human Rights Act is significant for members of sex and gender minority communities because it offers hard won symbolic recognition. While trans citizens are protected under existing human rights categories, the formal acknowledgment of gender identity provides legal grounds to resist exclusion and fight misogynist violence. (Irving and Evans 2010)

On February 9, 2011 the Canadian House of Commons passed Bill C-389, or what is commonly referred to as the “Transgender Rights Bill.” The bill proposes to add “gender identity” and “gender expression” to both the Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code. One of the interesting things about the movement to pass Bill C-389 is that despite the lack of explicit reference to gender identity and/or gender expression within existing human rights legislation, there is an increasing trend to include them under the category of “sex.”(Ontario. Human Rights Commission. 2010) Thus, as the quotation above illustrates, the legislation is important, not because trans people are not protected under current human rights legislation, but because the new legislation represents “symbolic recognition” with an explicit “formal acknowledgment” of the right to gender identity and gender expression. The passing of Bill C-389, then, is a significant milestone in the Canadian state’s formal recognition that trans citizens are deserving of protection within the rubric of human rights. Despite the passing of Bill C-389, the calling of a federal election for the spring of 2011 prevented the bill from continuing onto the Senate. Consequently, the formal recognition of trans rights has been put on hold, until the forming of a new government. At that time, a trans rights bill will need to be reintroduced to the House and the process of passing the proposed legislation will begin anew.

Given the acknowledgement that the substance of Bill C-389 is primarily symbolic, I want to use this moment as an occasion to interrogate the significance that ‘recognition politics’ have for trans people specifically and marginalized groups more generally. Drawing on the work of Charles Taylor, Judith Butler and Henry Rubin, I argue that because frameworks of recognition require the affirmations of an Other, recognition politics are limited to a reactionary politics based upon inclusion within existing (albeit intersectional) categories as opposed to an active politics of transformation. Moreover, these frameworks continue to reify the self/subject as an essentialized being, complete with identity. In contrast to frameworks of recognition, I draw on Deleuzo-Guattarian theory to theorize trans as an asubjective, substantive becoming-multiple. The dynamic movement of becoming-trans emphasizes a politics of becoming that underlies all identities and identifications. The emphasis on “molecular” becoming as opposed to “molar” being, or on acts and forces as opposed to identities and identifications, opens up new avenues of exploration outside of those limited by a politics of recognition, thereby producing new bodies and new relationships—new assemblages. In this sense, the dynamic movement that characterizes trans assemblages requires attending to trans politics in particular, and politics in general, in terms of a politics of acts, a politics of impersonal forces, a politics of becoming. I conclude that in order to transform the position(s) of those who are marginalized, politics must simultaneously work towards recognition on the one hand and on the other hand unravel the very conditions on which recognition is based. Only a politics based on both recognition and becoming can alleviate suffering and challenge oppression.

Recognition and Intersectionality

Recognition politics involve the demands of marginalized or so-called ‘minority’ groups for recognition by and inclusion within the state. Although theorists using the concept of recognition are more nuanced in their understandings of who/what actually grants recognition (Taylor, Butler and Rubin are good examples of this), recognition *politics* are aimed at the state, which grants recognition through allocation of rights. Many frameworks of feminism, anti-racism, sexuality, (dis)ability, and trans rights, for example, operate on the basis of recognition. In this context, recognition politics entail an oppressed group demanding state recognition of that group’s particular marginalized position. If the state is successfully lobbied, recognition is granted in the form of group rights that officially prohibit discrimination on the basis of that group identity. In one sense, recognition politics are a simple process: the goals of these politics are clear cut, that is, to achieve group recognition/rights. This is not to say that recognition is easy to achieve, but that there is very little nuance or complexity involved in the framework of recognition politics itself. The complexities come with how to go about achieving recognition, not with recognition as a goal per se. The various theorizations of recognition are more complicated. Consequently, the following section puts the work of Taylor, Butler and Rubin into conversation. It argues that despite significant differences between the three theorists, their shared emphasis on recognition results in their inability to challenge the processes produce marginalization in the first place. Moreover, the section concludes that even broadening the framework of recognition to include intersectional insights cannot rectify the shortcomings of recognition frameworks.

In his canonical text, “The Politics of Recognition,” Taylor argues that recognition forms a crucial component of individual’s ability to negotiate the social. He argues that in refusing recognition, “nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.”(1994: 25) Accordingly, recognition in the current context is quite simply “a vital human need.”(1994: 26) Taylor’s text is one that recounts the way in which recognition has come to hold this vital position within modern society in general and Canadian society in particular. Although the text is a specific engagement with Rousseau, Taylor cites Hegel as giving recognition its “most influential early treatment,” and it is clear from Taylor’s analysis of recognition that Hegel’s master/slave dialectic has a prominent role in his understanding of the “dialogical relationship” between the self and the social. The purpose behind Taylor’s historical narrative in the text is to argue that the recognition of “equal dignity” or “equal value” should be granted to those identity groups who demonstrate “authentic difference.” Because modern identity is “inwardly generated,” forms the core of being human and only emerges through social relations, respect for intrinsic difference is the key social component that allows someone to achieve full humanity.

Taylor’s framework of recognition (and indeed all frameworks of recognition) is based on concepts of identity/identification, the self and subjectivity. Taylor argues that “human beings always have a sense of self.” (1995: 58-59) Moreover, this sense of self is not limited to the modern period; as such, Taylor contends that human beings have always had a sense of self. The difference between the modern self and previous conceptions of the self is that over time the innate human capacity for “inwardness” has developed into the modern ability of humans to objectify the self. Taylor calls this ability for objectification, or the ability to reflect upon one’s self as a self, “radical reflexivity.”(1989: 175) Moreover, for Taylor dialogical relations are the key component of human nature. The identity of the self emerges through “dialogue with,

sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us.”(1994: 33) In this sense, the self is in continuous dialogue with the social. Recognition, then, is an ongoing process through which the deeply experienced identity of the self is validated by the social.

Moving into a more complicated theory of subjectivity, Butler’s theorization of the nexus between identity/identification, the self, subjectivity and the social is quite different than that of Taylor. However, because Butler ultimately operates within a framework of recognition, there is overlap between their seemingly disparate work. Because Taylor does not distinguish between the subject and the self, it is worth outlining the way in which Butler makes this distinction. Butler argues that rendering the subject and the self coterminous is “a conceit of autonomous self-determination,” (2004: 149) a conceit which her Foucauldian account of subjectivity exposes as fiction. Butler distinguishes between the subject and self in the following manner: the subject is a category in language, while the self is a relation to alterity that is established in the context of subjectification. (2004; 1995) She argues that “the subject who emerges as a speaking being is able to cite itself as an ‘I,’ and provisionally to establish through exclusion the linguistic contours of its own ‘I-ness.’” (1995: 139) Here, the subject is able to linguistically articulate an ‘I,’ or in other words, articulate its self as an ‘I.’ Thus, the subject articulates a particular bounded entity, an ‘I’ based on an internal self. Butler’s phrasing of the subject that cites itself as an ‘I,’ implies that there is a remainder in this process that exceeds the terms of the citation. In other words, the self exceeds both the subject and the ‘I.’ I will return to this remainder in the discussion of the psyche. For now, it is enough to note that the self is never fully able to articulate itself in its entirety. Butler goes on to state that her objection to an ‘I’ that is based on, or “requires the abjection of others,” is that “it weakens the sense of self.” (1995: 140) Hence, for Butler that the subject, the ‘I,’ and the self are closely related. The subject emerges, cites itself as an ‘I,’ thereby erecting a particular type of bounded entity (within the already bounded entity of the subject), which in turn impacts the integrity of the self—the integrity of the ‘I’ is the integrity of the self.

According to Butler, subjects come to be through processes of subjection/subjectification, whereby power inaugurates the subject into being. This conceptualization of subjectification and the process of becoming a self blends a Foucauldian conception of *assujettissement* with a Hegelian framework of recognition. Drawing on Foucault, Butler argues that “power that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject’s self-identity.” (1997: 3) This ‘psychic form’ of power operates as the Hegelian ‘unhappy conscience,’ where the slave internalizes the master to the point where the ‘master’ is no longer separate from the slave, but is internalized within the slave’s psyche. Moreover, Butler argues that “the very possibility of subject formation depends upon a passionate pursuit of recognition.” (1997: 113) This passionate pursuit occurs within a situation where processes of subjectification reveal a subject that is willing to subordinate itself to power. This willingness to subordinate itself indicates a psychic willingness on behalf of the ‘pre-subject’¹ to accept its subjection, exposing the fact that the subject is already always implicated in processes of subjection. Thus, paradoxically in its desire to be (a subject), the subject wills its own subjection. As Butler states, “a subject turned against itself (its desire) appears, on this model, to be a condition of the persistence of the subject.” (1997: 9) Subjectification is not imposed by an external power, but rather is internalized by the subject (and indeed apparently by the ‘pre-subject’) and takes the form of a “self-identity.” (1997: 3) Subjectification, then, is inherently bound up with subjection/subordination to an internalized power upon which the subject relies in order to exist.

Significantly, despite being internalized, the power that confers recognition is always also external to the subject and the self. For Butler, subjects are constituted within an exclusionary matrix, through “the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation.” (1993: 3) In this context, identification takes place through repudiation, where the foreclosed desire creates a zone of abjection that founds the subject. Following Hegel, Butler’s conceptualization of the self that emerges from the processes of subjectification is ‘ekstatic.’ (2004; 1999) In other words, it is a self that experiences its immersion in the other as a loss of coherence, thereby forcing the self outside itself. The self recognizes its similarity to the Other, which it experiences as a loss of self, a loss of that which distinguishes it from all else. In order to separate itself from the Other, to fill its originating loss, the self desires and requires recognition from that Other. Because the self is constituted in this process of loss, there is no return to an original self (there is no ‘prior’ self to return to). The self’s ability to articulate itself is limited by the confines of language and self knowledge. In this sense, the self cannot fully separate from the Other. In seeking to distinguish itself from the Other, and thereby prompt recognition, the self encounters a limitation in its ability to articulate itself, a limit which the self experiences as a loss and which gives rise to misrecognition. The self is, thus, subject to continual self-loss in its inability to distinguish or separate itself from the Other, and the Other can never provide the recognition desired. Ultimately the self suffers repeated loss in its search for recognition: unable to define or articulate itself adequately, the self’s situation is one of continual misrecognition. Butler argues that because processes of subjectification exploit the subject’s desire to exist, a desire that can only be externally fulfilled, subjection “marks a primary vulnerability to the Other in order to be.” (1997: 21) The subject desires recognition of its self, the price of which is a capitulation to an external power, to the Other; hence, the subject internalizes the external conditions set by the (perceived) power of the other. As the price of its existence, the subject enters a situation where its sense of self, the integrity of its ‘I’, and the coherence of its identity can only be granted through recognition (by the Other) as a sanctioning of its existence—a recognition that can never be fully realized.

Given that the subject comes to be under conditions of prohibition, abjection and loss, part of Butler’s theoretical project is to theorize the possibilities of ethical, self-cohesive resistance to hegemonic norms. Ultimately, Butler argues that a self constituted as a result of abjection is a threatened self, whose autonomy rests on the repudiation of the Other. She states:

If the ‘I’ that I am requires the abjections of others, then this ‘I’ is fundamentally dependent on that abjection; indeed, that abjection is installed as the condition of this ‘I’ and constitutes the posture of autonomy as internally weakened by its founding disavowals. My objection to this form of disavowal is that it weakens the sense of self, establishes its ostensible autonomy on fragile grounds, and requires repeated and systemic repudiation of others in order to acquire and maintain the appearance of autonomy. (1995: 140)

Butler’s call, then, is “for the development of forms of differentiation which lead to fundamentally more capacious, generous, and ‘unthreatened’ bearings of the self in the midst of community.” (1995: 140) This call for a less threatened self is true to Butler’s larger theory of agency, which recognises the subject as an ambivalent form of agency, where power both ‘acts on’ and is ‘enacted by’ the subject. (1997: 15) Here the requirement of power to reiterate itself,

along with its constitution of a subject, brings with it the possibility of reversal, where the very subject inaugurated by power can challenge power. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler argues that resistance to power is found not in the subject per se, but in the psyche. Here she distinguishes between the psyche, which includes the unconscious and the subject, which does not. (Butler 1997) It is only when the unconscious—the residual of the subject’s discursive constitution—is considered that discursive power’s failure to fully interpellate becomes clear. The residual unconscious of the psyche evidences that processes of normalization are never able to fully (over)determine subjectivity. Given that the psyche is never fully given over to identifications and able to be consciously articulated by the subject, recognition can never be fully granted. Within this logic, Butler’s project is a limited one, never fully breaking from the logic of recognition, where the ‘goal’ can only be to shift or lighten the burden of differentiation, to challenge power’s totality from within a limited purview, and to create freer selves.

In terms of trans theory in particular, the framework of recognition gets its most substantial treatment in the work of Rubin. Rubin argues that despite current academic concerns with the death of the subject and critiques of an essential self, theorists must engage with female-to-male trans people’s (ftm) accounts of their experience in terms which take “experiential reports of a core identity seriously.” (2003: 12) Thus, Rubin theorizes ftms in the context of an essential self, the identity of which is historically informed. Noting that contemporary critiques of core identity are historically situated as a reaction to the transcendental subject, Rubin takes up the essential self in the context of highlighting experience over “an undue emphasis on structural constraint and the discursive constitution of the subject.” (2003: 11) He argues that “everyone has an internal identity,” (2003: 13) which he variously refers to as a self, essential self, deep subject, core self, or subject. However, Rubin does not simply take experience and experiential accounts of the self at face value. He fuses the phenomenologically informed, experiencing self with genealogy by arguing that the core self operates within a historical context that limits subjective identifications. Similar to the way in which Taylor articulates the possibilities of the self, for Rubin, ftm identification with the category male is made possible through a cultural milieu that is historically conditioned. The experience of a core identity is articulated through available, historically contingent, social categories.

Rubin contends that embodiment, authenticity, and recognition play an integral role in trans (ftm) subjectivities and experiences. Rubin argues that the “tension between body image (subjectivity) and the physical body (materiality) is at the heart of transsexual desire.” (1998: 274) The misrecognition of ftms as a sex with which they do not identify results in both physical and emotional discomfort, and a desire to alleviate this suffering. (Rubin 2003: 11) Rubin theorizes this process of alleviation through the lens of recognition, where the desire of ftm subjects is to be recognized as the men that they are. Drawing on Taylor’s conceptualization of the nexus between recognition and authenticity, Rubin argues that “authenticity is a leading principle behind an FTM’s life,” (2003: 15) and that “FTM lives are a search for recognition of the innermost self...FTM body modification is a situated, contextual project of authenticity based on the principles and demands of recognition in modern society.” (2003: 15) In order for ftms to have their authentic male self recognized, they pursue the body modifications (hormones, surgery, and so forth) that will authenticate their bodies as male.

Despite some significant differences between the three theorists in their conceptualizations of self, subjectivity and identity, their accounts of the processes of recognition are similar. Clearly, the validity Rubin and Taylor ascribe to core identity and essential self distinguishes their work from Butler. Rubin agrees with Butler’s argument that identity in

general, and gender in particular, are performative, however, he adds that “the expressionist model is a fiction we have created. It is a powerful fiction that cannot be dismissed simply because we would like it to disappear. It is, in fact, one that people in this culture cannot do without.” (Rubin 2003: 150) Rubin, thus, contends that it is important to understand how and why ftms use the expressivist paradigm. In his explanation of ftms’ use of an expressivist model, Rubin argues that “the belief in a core male identity is an effective means of attaining the respect typically denied to ftms.” (2003: 152) Rubin’s explanation of ftm identity, then, entails a discussion of recognition and authenticity. Similar to Taylor and Butler, Rubin defines recognition as the process through which two “bounded entities,” a self and an Other, acknowledge their distinction from each other (their separate boundedness). In granting recognition to each other, these two entities establish not only their distinction, but also their integration through a process of mutual, reciprocal acknowledgement. In this sense, identities are formed through intersubjective relations. Rubin also notes that “the ability of the self to recognize itself is a significant and necessary achievement that must precede intersubjective recognition.” (2003: 15) Rubin concludes that in order for ftms to recognize themselves (that is, their own internal sense of self) and for social recognition of this internalized self, “these men invoke the hegemonic belief that all men have male bodies and modify their bodies. This is nothing less than an ingenious reinvigoration of ... hegemonic beliefs for the project of self-realization and social recognition.” (2003: 152)

Both Rubin and Butler engage with the Hegelian insight that self/Other recognition is both an intra- and inter- subjective process. Although Taylor’s focus is on formal recognition, he would undoubtedly agree that recognition is both a public (formal) and private (internal) process. (1994: 37) Despite their differences, all three theorists rely on a framework of recognition, which ultimately traces back to Hegel. This framework comes at a price where subjects are constituted, selves are recognized and identity is formed only through the engagement with an Other. This does not produce happy, recognized consciousnesses, but instead produces unhappy selves driven by loss, searching for recognition that can never be granted. Subjects emerge with an expectation that they will be recognized for their ‘true self.’ Their identity is supposed to exhaust their self with nothing falling outside its domain. However, the self can never recover from its originating conditions—there will always be an unrecognized remainder, and thus, recognition can never fully be achieved. In terms of trans, trans subjects will continue to find their mark of difference a frustration of their desire for recognition. As trans people begin claiming the social recognition they deserve, they ultimately depend on the Other for recognition. Even as formal recognition may lead to recognition in the larger social milieu, some part of the self will always escape recognition. In this sense, misrecognition is an intrinsic feature of frameworks based on recognition. Recognition politics within the formal sphere may fulfil the immediate needs of those who fit within state recognized categories and can access resources through which to ensure nondiscrimination, however, these politics cannot alleviate the misrecognition underlying the causes of exclusion in the first place.

In terms of intersectionality, even if the categories of recognition were to be envisioned in the most intersectional way possible, as multiple and overlapping, the key component of misrecognition that is fundamentally inherent in the processes of recognition would not be addressed. As Jasbir Puar makes clear:

Intersectionality demands the knowing, naming, and thus stabilizing of identity across space and time, relying on the logic of equivalence and analogy between various axes of

identity and generating narratives of progress that deny the fictive and performative aspects of identification: you become an identity, yes, but also timelessness works to consolidate the fiction of a seamless stable identity in every space.”(2007: 212)

Intersectional understandings of categories as multiple and overlapping continue to use categories in the same way as frameworks of recognition. Like recognition frameworks, intersectionality works to position identities by fixing them in ways that assume the self is exhausted by identity/identification and ignore the misrecognition inherent in the self’s identification with particular categories. In this context, politics continues to be framed as the pressure for inclusion. The only difference with an intersectional analysis is that inclusion is based upon overlapping and multiple categories. However, gridding identities and selves into multiple categories, thereby refining the categories of recognition, cannot address the underlying assumptions of frameworks of recognition that produce marginalization in the first place.

Beyond Recognition and Intersectionality

In contrast to frameworks of recognition and intersectionality, and following Elizabeth Grosz, I would like to suggest that rather than seeing politics as the struggle of a subject/self “to have its identity affirmed through relations, especially relations of desire but also relations of identifications and recognition, with other subjects, a subject who seeks the mutual and reciprocal identification with and recognition of others and a place as a subject within culture,” that we develop an understanding of politics as a “politics of acts, not identities...in which inhuman forces, forces that are both living and nonliving, macroscopic and microscopic, above and below the level of the human are acknowledged and allowed to displace the centrality of both consciousness and the unconscious.”(Grosz 2002: 470) In other words, I am suggesting a shift in theorizing that replaces a politics of recognition with what Grosz calls a “politics of imperceptibility.” This shift from recognition to imperceptibility entails moving from an emphasis on “molar being” to theorizing “becoming-molecular,” a shift from self/subject to assemblage. Thus, the section begins by outlining the terms integral to theorizing the politics of imperceptibility. It then moves into a discussion of becoming-trans and concludes with an analysis of the critical role becoming-trans has for politics.

An assemblage, despite the use of the noun form, is always an ongoing process. It is a “*process* of arranging, organizing, fitting together” that is in no way random or predetermined. (Wise 2005: 77) Assemblages do not represent, they are the real. They are an ongoing, creative assembling, selecting, of singularities and characteristics in terms of slowness, viscosity, acceleration, and rupture. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) Assemblages are synonymous with desiring-machines; as such, assemblages are the movement that is desire; they are desiring production. Assemblages face the (molar) strata on one side and the (molecular) ‘plane of consistency’/‘Body without Organs’ (BwO) on the other side. On the side of the strata, the assemblage is stratified, subjectified, organized, stable, and unitary. An assemblage stratified by molarity takes on the appearance of a unified self, a congealed identity, a singular body. In short, it revolves around the One. The following example from Deleuze and Guattari may help clarify, “what we term a molar entity is, for example, the woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject.” (1987: 275) On the side of the BwO, the assemblage is a constantly shifting, creating, disorganized, unsubjectified becoming.

Here, an assemblage exists as a molecular multiplicity, an open, nonlinear movement that connects to anything and everything.

In molar terms, it could be said that trans people simply exchange one identity for another, or in other words, a person changes from one sex to another, from one molar identity to another molar identity. It could also be said that a person always was one sex, and has simply brought their body in line with that sex; the originally sexed, molar self, or internal psyche has its body matched to it. In contrast to these molar conceptions, I am arguing that trans is about much more than the exchange of identities or coherence of self and body. Indeed, becoming-trans is an assemblage of desire where the processes of becoming are transformative. It is a becoming-multiple that from the point of view of the molar is identified as transition from one sex to another, while from the molecular is composed of an ongoing movement that characterizes all identities (trans or not) at some level.

Whether one identifies as transsexual, transgender, genderqueer, gender variant, or some other identity or combination of identities, all identities in general, and all trans identities in particular, have both molar and molecular aspects. To focus solely on molarity is to fundamentally miss the movement of becoming. It is this becoming-movement that is of critical importance to trans: the *movement* from one molar identity to another molar identity that gets codified as transition, or the *movement* from one body to another that allows the molar self to remain intact.² Thus, from the point of view of the BwO, becoming-trans is the molecular movement that creates a new multiplicity of connections, affects, speeds and linkages. Even as this substantive, molecular multiplicity is overcoded into molar identities, the presences of these identities goes some way to highlighting the underlying existence of “a thousand tiny sexes,” (Grosz 1993) or Deleuze and Guattari’s “*n* sexes.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 277)

Processes of stratification organize matter into molar entities that overdetermine its dynamism and ongoing becoming. Deleuze and Guattari define strata as “acts of capture,” which “consist of giving form to matters, of imprisoning intensities or locking singularities into systems of resonance and redundancy, of producing upon the body of the earth molecules large and small and organizing them into molar aggregates.” (1987: 277) Molarity sediments matter into systemic, molar forms that appear stable, unified, static, and singular. In this sense, the molar plane of organization transforms matter into stable forms. However, because the molecular movement of matter underlies all molar forms, the molar cannot fully stratify matter. Consequently, molarity is never fully accomplished or completely imposed. The multiplicity underlying molar forms means that molar forms are not actually unified or singular, but that the molar is a contracted, highly organized, unified multiplicity, or to use Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, the molar is a stratified multiplicity. As Brian Massumi states, “molarity limits individual deviancy but never entirely suppresses it...nothing is ever successfully molar...No body can really *be* molar. Bodies are *made* molar, with varying degrees of success.” (1992: 64) Thus, molarity can never fully stratify matter and the unified, singularity of the molar is always only the apparent overdetermination of a multiplicity. To speak in less Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, the self is a molar overdetermination. As Butler makes clear, the self can never be fully articulated, and thus there is always some residuum. The tendency to see the self as a singular, coherent unit despite the residual excess is a feature of molarity. Molarities, then, are bounded or limited multiplicities, which as a result of their tight formation are stratified and appear unified and singular, while the molecular is composed of substantive, or unbounded, unlimited multiplicities.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that the three main stratifying molar entities are organism, subjectification, and significance. These strata, like all strata, are “phenomena of accumulation,

coagulation, and sedimentation” that work to channel the desiring-production of matter in particular ways. (1987: 159) In terms of the organism, Deleuze and Guattari are referring to the stratification of matter into the unity of a biological organism, complete with separate organs assigned different functions and meanings. This organ-ization into a body enacts incorporeal transformations whereby matter sediments into molar entities/forms (or ‘bodies’ in the general sense): male/female, adult/child; or heart, kidney, bladder; and brain cell, fat cells, reproductive cells. Subjectification occurs when the ‘I’ of a statement mistakes itself as a pre-existing subject, as opposed to a linguistically constituted subject. The subject produced through processes of subjectification is “defined by a series of boundaries or prohibitions that limit the possible range of thought and desire; one is told what one is allowed to think and whom one is allowed to desire. Each conjugation reinforces a sense of identity.” (Goodchild 1996: 150) The more that is spoken by, to and about the subject, the more the subject identifies itself as a pre-existing entity (or self), complete with consciousness and identity. Matter is incorporeally transformed into a self, an identity, a consciousness inhabiting a body. The process of subjectification is closely linked to significance, where collective assemblages of enunciation immanent within language structure thought to (re)produce through signification. Here, order-words “organize acts, affects, desires, states of affairs. In this respect, statements presuppose and engender the imposition of a framework of intelligibility, a narrative, upon affects and states of affairs.” (Gatens 1996: 180) As chains of signifiers structure thought, order-words enforce socially accepted communication, thereby restricting the expression of matter. Matter is incorporeally transformed into that which can be communicated in, and is thus determined by, language. Because the molecular movement of bodies is constrained by molar processes of stratification, bodies ultimately suffer from these imposed limitations. As Deleuze and Guattari state, “desiring-machines make us an organism; but at the very heart of this production, the body suffers from being organized this way, from not having some other sort of organization, or no organization at all.” (1983: 8) In short, stratifications limit the ongoing molecular resonance/movement of the body.

In contrast to molar stratification, processes of destratification occur on the plane of consistency, or BwO. Deleuze and Guattari define the BwO as “the *field of immanence* of desire, the *plane of consistency* specific to desire (with desire defined as a process of production without reference to any exterior agency, whether it be a lack that hollows it out or a pleasure that fills it).” (1987: 154) Matter constructs, exists, produces only through desire. The dynamism of matter, its energy, its movement, its ongoing variation *is* desire. Desire is what produces the real. It is “a relation of effectuation, not of satisfaction.” (Gordon 1981: 32) As desire, the BwO is where matter creates, invents, *moves*. Desire in this context is not desire for something, but is an activity of ongoing production that seeks nothing more than indefinite expansion on the BwO. As Eugene Holland states, “desire on the BwO favors the moment of differentiation over the moment of contraction: as an expression of life, free-form desire disorganizes the organ-ization of the organism.” (2005: 62) Furthermore, Grosz makes clear that the BwO is “a surface of intensities before it is stratified, organized, hierarchized.” (1993: 175) Take away organism, significance, and subjectification and what remains is the BwO. In this sense, the BwO is the molecular excess of molar stratification and is populated by molecular multiplicities, or intensities of matter. As such, ‘one’ can never possess or own a BwO, there is no molar self, identity, or subject to take control—“it is always *a* body.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 164) Because the BwO is the leftover of destratification, and as such is inassimilable, residual desire, it operates as an unattainable limit. Behind each stratum is another stratum—

even as one molar stratum is destratified, another lies behind it, thus, processes of destratification are ongoing and never fully completed.

Assemblages face the strata on one side and the BwO on the other. Deleuze and Guattari define assemblages as “every constellation of singularities and traits deduced from the flow—selected, organized, stratified—in such a way as to converge (consistency) artificially and naturally; an assemblage, in this sense, is a veritable invention.” (1987: 406) Intensities and affects present in matter coalesce in assemblages. On the side facing the strata, assemblages are molarly organized, on the destratified side facing the BwO, assemblages are molecular multiplicities engaged in matter’s dynamic desiring-production. Thus, assemblages are situated in between, or in the middle of, molar organization on one hand and molecular becoming on the other hand. Assemblages’ molar organization is articulated in molar terms: subject, self, identity, form, while their molecular flow operates to undermine these stratified unities (or bounded multiplicities).

As they carve out a territory, assemblages originate in particular molar forms and at the same time undermine these forms, producing new potentials for becoming. These becomings eventually acquire new molar codifications and identities as the molar works to territorialize, or organize and stratify, becomings-molecular. Deleuze and Guattari state:

Starting from the form one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are closest to what one is becoming and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire. (1987: 272)

The inability of the molar to contain matter and its desiring production within particular categories results in a disjuncture, a moment where the discrepancy between molar stratification and the underlying productive force of matter can no longer be contained. In this sense, becomings begin from molar investments and the breakdown of stratified territories. Moreover, as Massumi notes, all becomings “begin as a desire to escape bodily limitation.” (1992: 94) Here, the body reacts to the disjuncture between molar categories and the multiplicity of matter, sensing it as a “little detail that starts to swell and carr[y it] off.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 292) The (molar) One places themselves in relation to new singularities, traits, and intensities, opening themselves up to the multiplicity of the molecular, thereby creating new assemblages.

Trans assemblages deduct from the newly deterritorialized matter traits and intensities that converge the affects newly produced by the swell of matter, thereby allowing the free flow of desire. The situation of assemblages between the molar and the molecular means that trans assemblages appear different from the perspective of the molar than from the perspective of the molecular. From the perspective of the molar, trans assemblages take on the appearance of unified, stratified singularities: coherent selves and singular identities (in this case, singular gender/sex). However, from the perspective of the molecular, trans assemblages are dynamic, ongoing assemblings of singularities, intensities, and traits. Molar understandings of trans, like Rubin’s, read trans as the movement from one identity, one body, one form to another identity, body, form. Those molar analyses of trans read trans desire as desire for something specific—as desire to: transition from one sex to the other, cohere the self, return to the body, achieve recognition. In this context, desire is defined as a relation of satisfaction. As discussed above, theorising the molecular means working with an understanding of desire that defines desire as a

relation of effectuation. Desire produces the real; it is, thus, *the* force of production, a libidinal 'will to power.' The libidinal movement of matter deterritorializes molar entities, breaking through their stratified unities, freeing the flow of desire, creating new potentials, relations and affects. From the perspective of the molecular, trans is this movement of deterritorialization, a productive, libidinal investment in molecular becoming.

Becomings-trans explode the stratified (human) body, placing it into proximity with new potentials. Consequently, trans operates as a productive force. Trans bodies operate as non-linear resonance chambers, ongoing events of resonating energy, full of singularities, intensities, and points of convergence. This creation of new relations, potentials, and affects generates new bodies and new becomings. From this dynamic movement, assemblages select particular singularities, intensities, and traits, coalescing them into a cohesive territory, or body. Thus, as trans assemblages free the ongoing variation of matter, new bodies are produced, opening up the possibilities of different genderings, sexings, and sexualities. The molecular multiplicity of becoming-trans precipitates the creation of new molar categories. As the movement of becoming-trans deterritorializes molar unities, trans assemblages multiply desire, fracturing the One, violating the limits of molar prohibitions and categories. Thus, despite its emergence from molar subjectivities, becoming-trans operates to undo molar organization and responds to the dynamism of matter. Conceptualized in this manner, trans signals the radical openness of the body.

A politics based on becoming and assemblage pays particular attention to the forces producing the dual motion of stratification and destratification. As a force, desire is not directed at any particular thing, but operates as a libidinal will to power seeking only its own expansion and producing the world in the process. Becoming-trans is a force outside molar conceptualizations of the subject or self. Politics from this perspective is not about the actions of subjects in relation to power, identity, or difference, nor is politics about the recognition of the self. Politics is the relational tension between forces both competing and cooperative. Subjects and other molarly constituted bodies are produced as a result of these imperceptible forces. As these forces create, they work through and within the subject, stabilizing in molar forms and unraveling in the molecular. Thus, a politics of imperceptibility operates within the nexus of the molar and molecular. Politics, then, is the by-product of forces acting "through subjects, objects, material and social worlds without distinction, producing relations of inequality and differentiation, which in turn produce ever-realigning relations of intensity or force." (Grosz 2005: 189) The strategy behind a politics of imperceptibility is not based on subjects vying for recognition, but on the production of multiplicities (molecular assemblages). This is a politics of acts not subjects, of production not recognition, of creation not mediation. Trans-becomings are simply one set of assemblages caught up in, and produced by, the ongoing movement of forces, the desiring production of the molecular on the BwO.

In their engagement with becoming, the production of assemblages comes with considerable risks, and the engagement of trans assemblages with becomings-trans is no exception. In freeing matter from molar stratification, all becomings risk dissolution. Thus, destratification cannot be undertaken without a degree of caution. As Deleuze and Guattari make clear "in dismantling the organism there are times one courts death, in slipping away from significance and subjection on courts falsehood, illusion and hallucination and psychic death." (1987: 160) Indeed, these risks are prevalent in accounts of becoming-trans. Becoming-trans undermines the molar imposition of a unified, singular body that represents an interior self, or subjectivity. Those trans people who do not fit within the molarly conceived normative

sex/gender system risk not only those feelings of dysphoria on a day to day basis as they are subjected to continual misrecognition, but also face violence and death. For example, Kate Bornstein articulates her experience of trans as a type of “madness.” (1995: 95) Leslie Feinberg almost died when medical practitioners refused to treat hir because ze is gender-nonconforming—and indeed Feinberg links hir ongoing health problems with Lyme disease that went undiagnosed as a result of these transphobic medical practices. (1998: 1-3) Viviane Namaste documents the high rates of violence perpetrated against those whose gender expression do not match normative expectations. (Namaste 2000) These accounts all point to the risks associated with those who are unable or unwilling to turn their molecular becomings-trans into some form of molarly recognized cohesion. For this reason, molar politics regarding the right to nonnormative gendered and sexed expression are necessary. The call to molecularity and becoming is not a call to ignore the molar. I am not arguing that we abandon recognition politics. The argument here is that the molecularity inherent in processes of recognition is not the sum total of existence, that the molecular is of particular importance to trans, and that becoming-trans signals a becoming-multiple that underlies all molar entities. Thus, I am not arguing against pursuing the reintroduction of a new trans rights bill. Rather, I am making two separate albeit related suggestions. First, I am suggestion that recognition politics be reconceptualised as the interplay of impersonal, imperceptible forces acting through and constructing subjects. Conceiving of recognition in terms of subjects confronting one another only further reifies molar conceptions of the self/subject and does nothing to address the misrecognition intrinsic to processes of recognition. This reification, then, only serves to reinscribe the conditions that produce marginalization in the first place. Consequently, my second suggestion is that politics not be limited to pursuing recognition within the formal sphere. Only through attending to the molecular can the inadequacies inherent in frameworks of recognition be addressed and the very real suffering of the marginalized be alleviated.

¹ Here, ‘pre-subject’ refers to the subject before it is constituted. Because the subject only emerges through process of subjectification, prior to these processes, no subject exists. ‘Pre-subject’ is the grammatical place-holder I have chosen to mark this non-entity. For further elaboration of the temporal conditioning of the subject see: (Butler 1997)

² Note that transition does not apply only to transsexuals, or those who ‘change’ sex/gender. Most trans people will refer to a process/moment of what I am calling becoming-trans, whether they express it as an acknowledgement of nonnormative gender/sex expression, coming out as trans (and the associated self work or body work entailed), or more traditionally as transition (even if their transition is not traditional). All of these expressions are a type of transition, or movement.

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