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Review Article

Trans Vocality (Or How to Open New Perspectives Against Gender Normativity in Relation to the Voice)

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines how a society grounded in the supremacy of hetero-cisnormativity contributes to the exclusion of transgender voices. Through colonial processes that erased the legitimacy various Indigenous communities once granted to gender-dissident identities, the notion of a "correct" and "acceptable" voice was imposed—marking other voices as wrong, in need of correction, or subject to silencing. If the sound of a trans voice was not permitted, its discursive act was even less so. This exclusion has contributed to a lack of representation in public spaces and the continued marginalization of voices that disrupt the cisgender male/female binary. To meaningfully advance the denaturalization of gender norms and challenge the hegemonic parameters that shape sexuality, a transformation in how we both see and listen is essential. Only through such a shift can other vocalities be validated and uplifted—vocalities that liberate the rigid notions of timbre and tone that have long dictated what a voice should be.

Keywords:
Vocality; Embodiment; Transgender People; Sound; Listening; Seeing

La vocalidad trans (o cómo abrir nuevas perspectivas contra la normatividad de género en la voz)

RESUMEN

El presente ensayo busca evidenciar cómo los efectos de una sociedad basada en la cisheteronormatividad como ideal supremo, traen como consecuencia la exclusión de las voces transgénero. A partir de operaciones colonizadoras que barrieron con la legitimidad que variadas comunidades indígenas otorgaban a las identidades sexo-disidentes, se instaló la idea de voces correctas y aceptables por sobre otras equivocadas que debían corregirse o silenciarse. En efecto, al no permitir el sonido de una voz trans menos podría permitirse el acto discursivo de esa voz. Esto sin duda consolida una falta de representatividad en los espacios públicos y una constante marginación para las voces que rompen el binômio cis-masculino/femenino. Sin embargo, para empujar un avance sustancioso en el acto de desnaturalizar las normas de género y cuestionar los parámetros hegemónicos que delimitan la sexualidad, es fundamental un cambio en las categorías de mirar y escuchar. Sólo así se puede validar y enaltecer a otras vocalidades que ayuden a liberar las rígidas nociones de timbre y tono que durante tanto tiempo han determinado lo que una voz debe ser.

Palabras clave:
Vocalidad; Cuerpo; Transgénero; Sonido; Escucha; Mirada

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Vocalidade trans (ou como abrir novas perspectivas contra a normatividade do gênero na voz)

ABSTRACT

Este ensaio procura mostrar como os efeitos de uma sociedade baseada na cisheteronormatividade como ideal supremo resultam na exclusão das vozes transgênero. A partir de operações colonizadoras que deitaram fora a legitimidade que diversas comunidades indígenas concediam às identidades dissidentes sexuais, estabeleceu-se a ideia de vozes corretas e aceitáveis em detrimento de vozes erradas que deveriam ser corrigidas ou silenciadas. Com efeito, ao não permitir o som de uma voz trans, menos o ato discursivo dessa voz poderia ser permitido. Isto consolida, sem dúvida, uma falta de representação nos espaços públicos e uma constante marginalização de vozes que rompem o binômio cis-masculino/feminino. No entanto, para impulsionar progressos substanciais no acto de desnaturalização das normas de género e do questionamento dos parâmetros hegemônicos que delimitam a sexualidade, é essencial uma mudança nas categorias de olhar e ouvir. Só assim poderão ser validadas e enaltecidas outras vocalidades que ajudam a libertar as noções rígidas de timbre e tom que há muito determinam o que uma voz deve ser.

Palavras-chave:
Vocalidade; Corpo; Transgênero; Som; Escuta; Olhar

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INTRODUCTION

The Voice as Evidence

The voice constitutes a language in itself, yet it has a deeply collaborative and adaptable nature. It emerges from a body, requires air as raw material, and projects itself into the world as sound that travels through physical space. As the primary medium for speech, the voice plays a central role in the operations of language; in other words, the voice exceeds speech, though the speaker's voice always conditions speech. Hence, when gender theorist Judith Butler refers to the discursive act as "a bodily act with specific linguistic consequences" (Butler, 1999, p. 31), she implicitly invites us to consider the voice as a fundamental component of speech production.

However, to relegate the voice to mere material in the service of words would be to strip it of its singularity—that which distinguishes one voice from another—and to diminish its relational power. Put differently, because the act of speaking involves vocal sound, there is a phenomenon that transcends the specific content of words, creating a relational effect between speakers and listeners (Cavarero, 2005). Thus, to think about the voice is to engage in an exercise where sound, body, and identity cannot be disentangled.

I find it particularly compelling to explore the tensions between voice, body, speech, and identity. Suppose the body is the first stage upon which discursive performance takes place. In that case, it is the voice—both in its identity dimension and as the vehicle of words—that enables and shapes that performance, allowing for a relational experience that affects speakers and listeners alike. However, if within that experience the sounding body transgresses gender norms—for instance, a non-binary or transgender body—can it be listened to with the same attention granted to corporealities that conform to hetero-cis-normativity? To what extent is it possible to appreciate the content conveyed by a voice independently of its sound? In what ways do gender norms influence the reception and appraisal of a voice's speech act?

This essay examines how hetero-cis-normative society has categorized—and often punished—the voices of trans people, treating them as synonymous with incorrect, perverse, and unnatural. Through colonial operations across the world and the impact of their repressive mechanisms, we can observe an explicit desire to regulate the free expression of bodies, promoting an ideal of vocal aesthetics and politics. This ideal, anchored in the binary categories of the feminine and the masculine, silences trans voices both in form and content due to their dissident embodiment. Consequently, social sanction falls upon trans vocality as a

repressive veil that constrains the right to the free expression of their unique voices.

The theoretical framework of this work is grounded in key authors within contemporary gender studies (Butler, 1999, 2020; Preciado, 2002), alongside manuscripts that approach the voice from the perspectives of philosophy (Cavarero, 2005; Dolar, 2007) and the performing arts (Davini, 2007). It also draws on contributions from anthropology on the concepts of body and identity (Millaleo, 2002), and, in a particularly inspiring way, on the writings of Queer authors such as Pedro Lemebel (1996) and Susy Shock (2020).

The narrative structure of this essay is organized into two sections. The first is devoted to analyzing the body as the material and visual foundation of identity—the site where the gender struggle unfolds and where the conditions for the voice materialize. The second seeks to explore the social and identitary effects of the voice, its relationship with discursive apparatuses, and its constant submission to rhetoric and modes of listening.

Other Bodies, Other Gazes

In *Gender Trouble* (1999), Judith Butler seeks to thoroughly and radically dismantle traditional ideas about gender identity. In her own words: "what we take to be real, what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender, is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality" (p. 28). This paradigm shift seeks to move away from a reductionist view of identity and gender as merely biological matters, since this view of gender perpetuates a violent conception in which identities that deviate from the binary and heterosexual paradigm are sanctioned and disapproved of for defying the societal ideals of gender expression.

Following Butler's path and adopting an even more subversive stance, Paul B. Preciado's *Countersexual Manifesto* (2002) states:

> Sexuality can't be reduced either to sexual difference or to gender identity. Sexuality is defined here as body politics, gesture aesthetics, and relational ethics. Sexualities are like languages: they are complex systems of communication and reproduction of life. (p. 89 [Spanish version])

According to Preciado, sexualities, like languages, can be learned; they are historical constructions rooted in biocultural impressions. Moreover, if the construct changes, our perception of which bodies and voices are acceptable also changes. "Like languages, sexualities can be learned. Multiple languages can be spoken (…) one sexuality is imposed on us in childhood, and it takes on the character of a naturalized desire" (p. 89 [Spanish version]).

It is precisely the articulation of diverse sexualities within an environment of genuine social tolerance that Preciado envisions with the concept of a *countersexual society*:

> A paradigm in which the anatomical or chromosomal differences between bodies are neither the basis for gender nor sexual identity, nor the argument used to legitimize any form of privilege, oppression, or violence. (p. 97 [T.N. direct translation from the Spanish version])

Preciado invites us to abandon the supremacy of reproductive bodies—the ultimate goal of human society in which bodies are valued only as potential producers of eggs or sperm, thereby perpetuating the "traditional family" chain of production. Nevertheless, legitimizing other bodies also entails legitimizing other identities, other voices, and, indeed, other ways of viewing the family unit.

However, to believe that the hetero-cis-normative narrative has been the only perspective in history is to disregard the wisdom of many Indigenous communities around the world who embraced the notion of a third gender. This is the case of the *hijra* in India—people who do not identify within the cis male–female binary, who may or may not be trans, and who often wear feminine clothing. In Hindu culture, sexual ambivalence and gender fluidity are deeply embedded in myths, in deities that shift between genders, and in figures that embody both sexes within a single being. The *hijra* community descends from a long ancestral tradition that once enjoyed great prestige and social status, but this declined during the British colonial occupation in India. In 1871, the colonial authorities enacted the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA), which classified *hijras* as criminals, initiating a persecution that forced them into hiding. Although the law that marginalized them from social life was revoked in 1949, *hijras* have not regained their former status of belonging and community inclusion (Taparia, 2011).

In North American Indigenous communities, the designation *two-spirit* describes people whose gender identity encompasses both their masculine and feminine spirits, without one prevailing over the other. Two-spirit people perceive gender as a fluid continuum of identities, orientations, and roles (Wilson, 1996).

Finally—and of particular significance within the Southern Cone—there is the *epu püllü* or *epu pillan* figure in Mapuche culture.

> "Gender-nonconforming Mapuche have existed for many years, even before what we now call the LGBT community. My name is Aliwen, and in *wingka dhungun*

> or Spanish, we could say that I am a non-binary trans woman. But in *Williche* territory (…) people like me were called *Epu Püllü*; *püllü* refers to the spirit that dwells within the body, and *epu* means two—that is, it was believed that gender-nonconforming people possessed not only one masculine or feminine spirit, but rather a combination of both, granting us characteristics of both genders. (…) *Epu Püllü* are a great treasure because our way of being allows us to be closer to the spiritual world and thus help sustain the social fabric." (Aliwen, as cited in Millaleo, 2022)

Thus, the presence of sex and gender diversity throughout history is undeniable; the issue lies in understanding how those diversities have been silenced. For researcher Ana Millaleo (2022), the repression of these embodiments and voices within the Mapuche people is a direct consequence of the Spanish colonization. Colonizers imposed a Christian moral bias in their armed and cultural campaign for the occupation of the territory, the bodies, and the symbolic imaginary of the Mapuche. In this sense, the colonial sexual matrix became deeply entrenched through linguistic operations that manipulated traditional Mapuche vocabulary. When the colonizers—particularly missionaries—created the first dictionaries, they established a distinction between the concepts of *body* and *soul*. The body was relegated to a Western understanding of genitalia, separate from the spirit. In doing so, colonial discourse alienated the *püllü* and condemned the body as sinful: "In the process of colonial Westernization, impurity had only one origin: the body" (Araya-Espinoza & Martínez-Guajardo, 2017, p. 23).

The use of translation as a tool to evangelize and dominate denied the Mapuche their own perception of sexuality, demoting the body and sexual act to the realm of the obscene and immoral. This contributed to an overvaluation of the masculine—the *weichafe* warrior potency—in opposition to the receptive feminine energy, deemed dangerous in itself due to its strong sexual magnetism. As a result, colonization polarized the gender roles, erasing all ambiguity or fluidity that might escape the binary man/woman archetype. It particularly subjugated female bodies, and—through the same predatory logic—erased all gender-dissident identities that refused to carry the banners of Western hetero-cis-normativity.

One of the most apparent effects of colonialism is the introduction of a new epistemology—a transformation in the parameters of the intervened community, compelling it to embrace new and foreign values. In the case of the Mapuche, if vocabulary was manipulated to disconnect the body from the soul, then to once again embrace non-binary identities, we need to expand the concepts framing our understanding of the body and the voice as merely physiological aspects—detached from emotion, self-determination, and sovereignty. Therefore, questioning language and its established forms, as well as reinterpreting and expanding its concepts, becomes an essential task—one that entails interrogating other actions such as *seeing* and *listening*. Both actions are perceptual in nature, and every perception involves a cognitive act in which language both occurs and develops (Maturana, 1994). To renew language is to enter new ways of seeing and listening. For now, I will focus on the gaze and its possibilities.

As Georges Didi-Huberman asserts, it is wrong to believe that we see only with our eyes, for the body sees just as language does (Camarzana, 2018). The apparent observable reality thus becomes an indisputable truth, sealed by language. In much the same way, social and cultural gender assumptions operate through seemingly self-evident truths. The problem is that, by virtue of their everydayness, such operations become imperceptible. This is why I find the exercise of questioning our gaze both urgent and inescapable to denaturalize gender.

Can we truly believe in our ability to discern a person's gender simply by looking at them? Is it possible to see beyond our acquired beliefs around gender? To address these questions, Butler (1999) begins with the example of cross-dressing. When a man dresses as a woman or a woman as a man, the observer perceives the first identity—"man" or "woman"—as the reality, while the second identity—clothing—appears as an illusion, an artifice that conceals and contradicts reality. This is because the observer assumes they *already know* the truth about the observed body, taking its anatomy for granted without any intimate knowledge of it. The observer thus reveals that all naturalized knowledge about gender stems from culturally inferred assumptions received as truth. However, when Butler pushes further and examines the gender expression of trans people, the observer's perceptions become significantly more problematic. This is because it is impossible to grasp someone's identity solely through the act of looking, or to rely on clothing, how it is worn, or whether that attire contradicts the gender identity presumed to belong to a given body.

We should remember that trans people are those whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not align with the sex assigned to them at birth (American Psychological Association, 2013). While *gender identity* refers to a person's internal experience of being a man, a woman, or nonbinary, *gender expression* is the way people communicate their gender identity through behavior or physical features. Therefore, the

external gaze is always prone to failure regarding its own perceptions, since no embodiment can be fully presumed at first sight. It is precisely this uncertainty that emerges in the act of looking—the body's lived experience that destabilizes the gaze itself (Butler, 1999).

There is no single or exclusive way of living and expressing sexuality and gender. Bodies cannot be subjected to the dictates of the purely biological or genital. A trans body may have undergone clinical intervention or may exist at different stages of transition. What is essential is to create spaces that sustain the *püllü*—the spirit anchored to the body—beyond any gaze, ideology, or exclusionary discourse.

Other Voices, Other Sites of Enunciation

When the body is seen as the primary stage for speech performance, it follows that the voice is also perceived as an entity amplifying meaning within that performance. However, the voice is far more than the sonic component of speech. Although speech and voice are closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing, the voice's sphere is broader than that of speech—it exceeds it (Cavarero, 2005). This excess, much like physical presence itself, can surround, influence, and access the listener through sound. In this way, whoever produces sound always does so with their voice's unique physicality (Fischer-Lichte, 2011).

The voice, as expressive matter, propagates through the air, allowing for an expansion of the self's boundaries. Indeed, if the body is a process of material embodiment, the voice is the process of uprooting that matter through sound. Thus, the voice works on many fronts simultaneously: on the one hand, it is the singular and sovereign expression of a body in continuous becoming; on the other, it is a fundamental element in connecting with others. In my view, this relational aspect of the voice—so often subjected to the pressures of communication and language—gives it an oscillating nature, causing it to pendulate between a commitment to individual freedom and a deep surveillance of its impact on relationships. From this perspective, the relevance of the voice as a critical and questioning element in the construction of identity and gender expression becomes evident.

Indeed, the voice of trans people is not exempt from the gender pressures that continually fall upon their bodies; on the contrary, it is precisely in the voice that dissident identity is most clearly revealed. Where the body represents an external surface that can be concealed beneath clothing and accessories, the voice emerges, producing "the most human of effects—the effect of interiority" (Dolar, 2007, p. 20). The voice thus becomes a crack through which the trans identity of the sounding subject breaks forth—the space that arouses suspicion of a corporeality that defies normative expectations. If gender assumptions originate in the external gaze, it is sound, the final link in the chain of what is presumed to be, that confirms them. Yet when the voice fails to ratify the gaze's supposition, it contradicts and sabotages the cisgender illusion that governs our perceptions. In revealing an unsuspected inner world, the voices of trans people expose how the act of listening emerges within the same binary, heteronormative, and colonial logic that subjugates the gaze.

Even without intending it, and due to both cultural and evolutionary factors, the human ear is trained to categorize sounds. Hearing is intrinsically tied to space/time appraisal. However, it is important to distinguish between *hearing* and *listening*; hearing is a physiological act, whereas listening involves deciphering the codes of what produces sounds; in other words, making sense of what the ears perceive (Barthes, 1986). Thus, the challenge posed by gender-nonconforming voices is to expand the feminine–masculine categories that have shaped our modes of listening. Can we, in truth, assert with total certainty what a woman's or a man's voice sounds like? Is sound—like the body—a mandate inscribed solely in biology? Can a voice be legitimized beyond its timbre, pitch, and tone? If, as Silvia Davini suggests, "the body and the subject cannot be separated from the production of voice and speech" (2007, p. 61), then for a trans person, being rejected for sounding "different" operates on multiple levels simultaneously. When a voice is dismissed for its sonic qualities, there is a loss of both meaning and the agency of the voice-holder. No discourse is valued for its content if the very sound flow that shapes it is deemed inappropriate.

Indeed, one of the first functions traditionally assigned to the voice is to be the material bearer of speech—the vehicle of meaning. This Aristotelian understanding of the voice has constrained its possibilities, restricting its freedom within conservative and uniform parameters of how one ought to sound and from where one ought to speak. In this sense, performance and theatre studies have made significant contributions to thinking about the voice and its effects within the discursive act. Below, I offer some insights relevant to this topic.

In *Cartografías de la voz en el teatro contemporáneo* (2007), theatre scholar Silvia Davini thoroughly reviews the concepts that frame how the voice is understood on stage. Following the path of Paul Zumthor, Davini reframes the notion of *vocality* from an anthropological perspective, defining it as "multiple forms of voice and speech production implemented by a specific human group within a given sociohistorical contingency" (p. 18). In other

words, vocality is understood as a dynamic, collective, and ever-changing process that serves its era.

In tracing the vocalities that have marked the history of Western theatre, Davini analyzes the power that rhetoric has exerted over the voice. Starting in ancient Greece, rhetorical systems have left their indelible mark on communication, public life, and theatrical representation. More specifically, Davini understands rhetoric as a practical discipline governed by norms that regulate speech—and its aesthetic, emotional, and intellectual impact on others. For Davini, the primary effect of rhetoric is the creation of a normative ideal that traverses both body and voice. This ideal, shaped from Aristotle through Cicero, envisions the speaker as a subject driven by a desire for perfection and social influence. If, as Cicero claimed, "no orator can be a good orator unless he is a good man [and] the perfect orator is the perfect man" (as cited in Davini, 2007, p. 29), then it can be inferred that rhetoric seeks not only to operate within the domain of language but also within the struggle for moral superiority in alignment with power. The value of discourse is thus a macropolitical one, sustaining society by making rhetoric a civilizing tool—an instrument of control that promotes social behavior consistent with dominant ideologies. The morality upheld by rhetoric corresponds to "an ethnocentric model of the perfect man, who is none other than the one who holds political, economic, and military power" (Davini, 2007, p. 30).

Consequently, the subjective power of the voice is confined to the repetition of an enunciative pattern—a prescribed mode of speaking and expressing oneself—where the prevailing model is unmistakably the hegemonic masculine one, to the detriment of the feminine and of gender-nonconforming corporealities. As the Argentine scholar aptly states, "rhetoric does not operate from vocality but upon it" (Davini, 2007, p. 13). It is this coercive paradigm that enables the instrumental approach to voice and speech in Western culture, resulting in a discernible asymmetry in how we listen to certain voices over others. To expand on this idea, it is worth pausing to consider the political and social implications of the listening parameters, for neither the voice nor listening stand outside the impact of politics on bodies. In *The Force of Nonviolence* (2020), Butler analyzes the subversive potential of sound, highlighting the transformative agency of laughter, crying, and other vocal productions beyond words—what she refers to as *noise*.

> The sounds we produce are crucial in establishing the presence of those who are not accustomed to being listened to (…) in parliamentary democracy, there is a subject who speaks, a subject who speaks only because they have a place recognized within the established structures of democracy. But what about those whose democratic demands go unheard? (p. 72 [T.N. Direct translation from the Spanish version])

What Butler suggests here is that the political space opened by the act of voicing is not equally accessible to everyone. Not all voices are heard—regardless of how loud they may be. This refusal to listen leads to a lack of representation in public spaces for those who do not conform to the ideal vocality of the so-called "perfect orator." To be gender-nonconforming is to realize that the political resonance of speech diminishes depending on who the speaker is. It is not enough to merely be a person to claim the natural right to expression. Instead, people—with all the unique power of their voice—must first fit within the matrix of social acceptability in order to qualify for the privilege of being listened to.

In my opinion, every time a trans person uses their voice, they are confronted with two possible scenarios. In the first, and perhaps most difficult scenario, the person alters their sound in order to approach the cisgender body image that others expect of them. In the second, the person fully embraces the particularity of their sound and chooses not to modify it. From my perspective, the first scenario rarely succeeds, as the wish to meet binary parameters is an externally imposed demand, though an entirely understandable one. The voice offers a sense of belonging; it opens a horizon that is shared with other identities. "We are social beings because of the voice and through the voice: the voice seems to lie at the very axis of our social bonds, and it constitutes the very texture of the social, as well as the intimate core of subjectivity" (Dolar, 2007, p. 26). To seek validation through one's voice is a way of securing connection and belonging within the collective. However, it is also an overwhelming task that forces a state of hypervigilance in the very act of producing sound. The second scenario appears to be easier, for it offers freedom—the possibility of expressing one's intimate subjectivity fully through sound. However, this choice, as authentic as it is disruptive, carries its own cost. As the Latin American writer and performer Susy Shock declares:

> "I claim my right to be a monster / neither man nor woman / neither XXY nor H_2O (…) / Only my vital right to be a monster / or whatever I call myself / or however I turn out / however desire and fuckin' will take me. / My right to explore myself / to reinvent myself / to make of my mutation my noble exercise." (Shock, 2020)

To categorize a body or a voice as "wrong" is to deny the chance to construct identity according to the vital desires and freedom

every person deserves. It is not the task of the voice to comply with repressive mandates that attempt to contradict its mutable nature. The voice is living matter; it resists all attempts at instrumentalizing it through words. Its sound is not subordinate to any discourse, for its sound *is* its discourse. To defend the individuality of the voice is to listen for the vibrant power in the sound of every speaker—to recognize that there are no second-class voices, that timbre and tone do not certify validity, nor do they define the beauty of vocal expression. Trans voices endure and persist, as they always have. It is, instead, the modes of listening that must adapt—to open themselves to other vocalities that create new meanings and thus grant the respect necessary for all bodies to imagine and inhabit a future horizon.

CONCLUSIONS

In the face of growing ultraconservative discourses that seek to devalue the lives of the gender-nonconforming community, I believe it is crucial, for healthy coexistence, to reframe our naturalized perceptions of gender. Questioning the assumption that all bodies are cis and straight is the first step toward dismantling the hierarchical violence that the gender binary imposes upon identities, bodies, and voices. Moving in that direction requires deepening our understanding of the categories of *seeing* and *listening*. These actions, far from being organic as often attributed, are profoundly infused with cultural biases that reveal how we have been taught to discern what we deem desirable. To think that we see only with the eyes, as Didi-Huberman noted (Camarzana, 2018), is to believe that we listen solely with the ears. Both practices—seeing and listening—are permeated by ideologies that are engraved within Western culture. This means that before looking at a body or listening to a voice, there is already an ideal we seek to satisfy through these operations—one that is deeply rooted in the masculine/feminine archetypes.

However, we should remember that we have not always seen or listened to bodies and their gender expression as we do now. Prior to colonization, across different parts of the world, many ancestral peoples afforded legitimate value to voices that escaped the gender binary. These voices often reflected identities in special connection with the spiritual realm—gender-fluid people who did not represent a threat to the values of their community but whose uniqueness was considered a contribution to the construction of the collective symbolic imaginary. In this sense, reclaiming the legacy of those communities may help heal the wounds of exclusion and violence still embedded within the hetero-cis-normative model.

To give a voice to all voices in their diversity is to understand that when a vocal sound is accepted, the discourse that voice carries is more likely to be heard. In this context, the speech act of trans people finds real opportunities for resonance and affective connection with other identities. To validate other sites of enunciation—other vocalities beyond the vocal apparatus—is a triumph for the voice as subjective matter, a reclaiming of the right to sound beyond the constraints that rhetoric seeks to impose. Furthermore, if, as Mladen Dolar affirms, "voice and listening are also at the center of politics" (2007, p. 21), contemporary critical theory has the task to push forward a revision of the normative discourses surrounding gender and identity—particularly those concerned with how the body and the voice provide the foundations for their performance.

Persecuting and punishing the gender-nonconforming community will never erase their existence, because their sexuality is diverse and constantly adapting, flowing in multiple directions. Creating space for embodiments that exceed the cisgender norm is also a way of acknowledging the vital force inherent in sexuality. I argue that we should allow this energy to help propel a new social contract—one in which voices can resonate and expand across the full spectrum of sounds available to body and spirit. Embracing difference means granting a valuable and visible space to other identities, engaging with them, and allowing them to articulate their own experiences: "Here is my face / I speak for my difference / I defend what I am / and I am not so strange / injustice disgusts me" (Lemebel, 1996).

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