8

Painting Social Change on a Body Canvas: Trans Bodies and Their Social Impact

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1   Introduction

This chapter explores the life and artistic production of a trans feminine-presenting individual as a specific, contextualised ("locally specific") case of non-hegemonic positively aimed "deviant" masculinity. It aims to show how the performer of such a complex identity consciously attempts to reverse the "othering" practices (Staszak 2009) that dominant discourses on masculinity (and femininity) often carry out at the expense of other competing discourses.[1] While it may appear controversial to include a trans female-identifying individual under the umbrella of masculinity (or at least in a volume on masculinity), this is a provocative way of bringing attention to the fact that women and transwomen produce performances and models that contribute to changing ideas around traditional maleness and masculinity. This is in line with Milani's assertion that "women and transgender and intersex individuals *also* perform a variety of different masculinities that serve a plethora of competing agendas"

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(Milani 2015b: 2). On the one hand, this chapter addresses Connell's (2005 [1995]: 848) invitation "to give much closer attention to the practices of women and to the historical interplay of femininities and masculinities" than research on masculinity has traditionally done. Indeed, the life and artistic production of the transgender person under consideration here (media celebrity Laverne Cox) is analysed as evidence of the crucial impact that discourses on masculinity have on the definition/re-definition of patriarchy: "focusing only on the activities of men occludes the practices of women in the construction of gender among men. As is well shown by life-history research, women are central in many of the processes constructing masculinities—as mothers; as schoolmates; as girl-friends, sexual partners, and wives; as workers in the gender division of labour; and so forth" (*ibid.*). On the other hand, Milani's invitation to "move the field of language and masculinities beyond an exclusive focus on male-born, male-bodied individuals" (Milani 2015b: 4) and dislocate masculinities from maleness is another aspect addressed here. Indeed, Cox's identity is explored in its complex picking and mixing of multiple aspects that may be separately (or traditionally) ascribed to masculinity or femininity. I focus on the counter-discourse of social improvement produced by the media celebrity chosen for this study (see also Di Nuzzo in this volume for another recent example of transgender counter-discourse). This counter-discourse helps to deconstruct and review (while clearly also apparently re-confirming, from a traditionally binary perspective) the Bourdesian view of masculinity as interlocking with aggressiveness and violence, insofar as it is constructed within the serious games of competition that men play with each other (Bourdieu 1990, 1997, 2001). Both feminine and masculine indices in transwomen can indeed offer an insight into masculinity, and though the "essence" of the latter obviously remains elusive even when looked for and analysed in its absence, it may become more marked in the process of the conscious or unconscious silencing and counter-enactment of certain elements (or indices) that is performed on it by individuals who were "assigned to a male gender role at birth" (see Zimman 2015).

A key point that this chapter will seek to make is that—while incorporating certain aspects of masculinity (and femininity) perceived as positive—the discursive practice focused on fails to produce other signs,

performances, and languaging[2] commonly deemed "appropriate" across the diversity of personal differences and transmitted as common sense through the power of persuasion, particularly via the media. In doing so, it "queers" (Halperin 1995, 2012; Sullivan 2003) social conditions which "promote and produce heterosexualities as natural, self-evident, desirable, privileged and necessary" (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 55). Indeed, the term "positively aimed" aims to convey the idea that the discourse in question implies an openly declared purpose of producing a counter-discourse intended not so much to balance out power distribution within the existing range of possible manifestations of masculinity (and femininity) as, rather, to bring about wider social improvement. Such a discourse actually represents one of the "well-crafted responses to racial/ethnic marginalisation, physical disability, class inequality, or stigmatized sexuality" discussed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 848), and/or similarly crucial counter-action to other forms of social injustice. Whereas dominant discourses tend to "other" practices that do not conform to the implicit "norms" dictating the "prototypical" forms of masculinity and femininity, the discourse analysed here consciously attempts to overturn such "othering" practices through the production of messages directly aimed at combating violence and more generally ameliorating human behaviour in society.

As for the decision to focus on a specific, contextualised instance of masculinity (and femininity), this stems from the view that identity is dynamic, changing in relation to different contexts and actors. As already hinted, gender is not looked upon as a stable system but rather as a reality which constantly creates and re-creates itself in relation to the degrees of masculinity/femininity of others and in different contexts: "'masculinity' does not represent a certain type of person but, rather, a way that men[3] position themselves through discursive practices" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 841).

While regarding masculinity (and femininity) as a multidimensional phenomenon in this sense, the chapter sets out to study the body representations and language production of the specific model identified as a "sexed text" (Baker 2008) or "sexed sign" (Milani 2014), based on the conviction that "*all* media producers have the *potential* to rescale social, cultural and symbolic capital, and thereby 're-shuffle' authority and

expertise on particular issues" (Milani and Johnson 2009: 6). Indeed, Cox is analysed in terms of how she is both an object of external gaze and the subject of a "political" discourse, focusing on linguistic and visual issues within both female and male representation at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and cultural belonging. Language and body are viewed as loci of identity formation, expression, and contestation, and Cox's performative (linguistic and visual) manifestations and her media portrayal do not simply seem to "choose those discursive positions that help […] ward off anxiety and avoid feelings of powerlessness" (*ibid.*: 842), nor to "promote self-respect in the face of discredit" (*ibid.*). On the contrary, they seem to articulate a more complex, forward-looking agenda.

The structure of this chapter revolves around the analysis of Cox's linguistic and body manifestations and her media portrayal, which follows this introduction and represents the core of the study, drawing from a mixture of frameworks. For visual analysis, Berger's theory of the male gaze (1972) is incorporated within the structure of multimodal analysis (Kress 2010; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006 [1996]) and focus on magazine, TV, and social media images of Cox. For textual analysis, reference will be made to Tannen's views on conversational style (1990) within the general frame of Discourse Analysis (Gee 1996 [1990] but also, among others, Wodak and Meyer 2009) and focus will essentially be on interviews and extracts from the television series *Orange Is the New Black*. The concluding section pulls together the points emerging from the analysis in order to look to the future, connecting emerging insights both with recent reports on transgender identity, and with research focused on bias towards transgender people and prejudice at large.

2   Laverne Cox's Fluid Transgender Identity as a Powerful Discourse of Social Change

Laverne Cox is the "transperson"[4] or "sexual and gender variant identity/ expression"[5] singled out in this chapter as a specific, contextualised case of non-hegemonic positively aimed "deviant" masculinity (and femininity). Language is a crucial aspect of the analysis as linguistic choices need to be

made in order to refer to the case identified (e.g. should a gendered or gender-neutral pronoun be used?). It is opportune that this section—which must also further delimit the field of analysis through a viable definition of its object of study—should refer to the proliferation of categories and the explosion of gender binarism witnessed in Gevisser 2015, and to Fleming's concurrent observation that the prevalent attitude to transgender identity, that is, "that the person really is the new gender, not merely that s/he/other designation is perceived as such" (Fleming 2015: 116). Fleming's radical view is that "[g]ender is mutable until it mutates" but this sounds unsatisfactory due to its being clearly paradoxical: all this seems to mean is that "those who change genders are now in the position of those who didn't have to or want to change—meaning what? That their gender was in fact solid all along? That it was in fact their sex? The theoretical overreach of transgender theory is in a situation common to all outsiders who want to claim that the status quo is illegitimate—until they become the status quo" (*ibid.*). Despite possibly sounding oversweeping, this perspective on the current attitude to transgender identity does seem to find real-life evidence in some countries' responses to (and re-appropriations of) the issue (see the quotations from Gevisser 2015 presented in the conclusion). However, the position adopted in this chapter will differ considerably, based not only on the idea that a person may still feel, act, and campaign (and be perceived and reacted to, particularly by the media) as transgender once the transition process is complete, but also on the conviction that every single individual displays and performs a variety of both male and female aspects and roles. Moreover, "sexual and gender variant identities/expressions" will be referred to as "transgender individuals" and "transgender persons" in this chapter, using pronouns and address terms favoured by Cox when focused on herself, and which coincide with her "new" gender. Finally, it is also worth considering that, as Eliason argues, "[w]e sometimes pride ourselves for being on the outside of the 'establishment' and consider ourselves to be activist-scholars, and there are certainly advantages to having the outsider perspective. On the other hand, there are huge benefits to being a part of the system, so that we can change it from the inside out. Being part of the system requires some level of compromise and following the 'rules'" (2014: 173).

The remarkable progress of transgender individuals in the USA, in terms of social visibility, collective awareness, and legal recognition of rights over the last few decades, is both typified and helped by Laverne Cox's Emmy nomination, her appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine, and the recent decision to install her wax figure at Madame Tussaud's, all three of which are historic firsts for a transgender person (see, e.g. Vanderhorst 2015). *Orange Is the New Black* (2013, and at the time of writing in its fourth season), the television series about Piper Chapman sentenced to 15 months in a federal prison on a drug trafficking conviction and whose life crosses the stories of other women struggling with incarceration, probably features the most successful of Cox's roles as transgender inmate Sophia Burset (for which she was nominated for Outstanding Guest Actress in a Comedy Series at the Emmys in 2014). Despite implicitly re-enforcing criminality as one of the common tropes of reporting on transpeople[6] (see, e.g. Baker 2014), the series is an excellent example of director Kohan's female-centred programming as well as her intervention in post-feminist representational paradigms. Progressively showing how "the civility and niceness" that Piper "experiences 'inside' as her innate character, herself, utterly depends upon the civil, racial, and economic privileges and protections that exist 'outside' of that self" (McHugh 2015: 22), the series disallows "the neoliberal, postfeminist framework of personal choice, freedom, and independence" (23–24), placing Laverne Cox and the transgender individual at the intersection of many paradigms and facing several crucial issues. However, the character of Sophia Burset, a former fire-fighter serving time for credit-card fraud, and the prison's hairdresser, represents an advancement in itself considering, as Cox argues, that "when folks want to write a trans character, the first thing that they think of is sex work" (NPR 2013).

The episode in which the public learn how she was sent to prison ("Lesbian Request Denied," directed by Jodie Foster) was one of the most poignant of the first series. The episode also reveals that Sophia (whose role before surgery was played by Cox's twin brother, musician M. Lamar) has a son, and that her wife supported her through her gender-reassignment process. The four seasons of episodes available at the time of writing focus on a variety of interesting and often topical issues. However, due to space constraints, this chapter will only briefly look at one episode

in the show, episode 12 in Season 3, which, due to its raising questions of maleness and masculinity, appears as particularly relevant and possibly conducive to fruitful discussion in the present context.

Cox has her own equally powerful story to tell in real life, as an advocate for trans rights both in words (she delivered, amongst other things, a stirring speech at the Creating Change 2014 conference for LGBT Equality) and deeds (she gently but firmly stopped journalist Katie Couric's intrusive questions on trans surgery and, above all, publicly supported CeCe McDonald, an African-American transwoman sentenced to 41 months in prison for a killing that, she claims, occurred in self-defence) (see Cox 2014). So visible is her presence in the US mainstream media that her omission from 2014 *Time*'s people of the year list caused outrage; the magazine editors later decided to make her the cover story for one issue, suggesting that a "tipping point" may have been reached in the transgender "movement" (see the photo of Cox published on the cover of *Time* magazine, 29 May 2014).[7]

Cox's performance (or at least perceived performance) of gender is a fluid one, encompassing both masculinity and femininity.[8] On the cover of *Time*, her image stands out as both hyper-feminine and womanly, statuesque in her tall and robust figure, and masculine in her clearly—however partly mitigated—assertive body positioning. A maximally assertive pose would have probably implied feet firmly planted and far apart and hands on hips, however the photographer's choice for a pose which can certainly not be described as relaxed with chest thrusting forward and lack of smile reflects a self-protective, self-reliant stance. More recently, Cox has been portrayed on the cover of *Variety* (Fig. 8.1[9]) and *Entertainment Weekly*'s LGBT Issue (as Lady Liberty), where again her stance comes across as confident, bold, and therefore subtly masculine, if one agrees with the fact that many people would still associate hegemonic masculinity with "strength, independence, dominance, and confidence" (Baker 2015: 34). On the *Variety* cover she wears a trouser suit, with no display of emotion on her face, and one elbow leaning on the arm of the chair, which creates an assertive undertone while also allowing the figure to take up more space on the page in the picture; on a cover for *Entertainment Weekly* she strikes a defiant pose with well-toned arms crossed in the foreground, chin resting on a Statue-of-Liberty-torch/training-weight and looking directly into

Fig. 8.1   Cox as photographed by Emily Hope for the cover of *Variety* (6 May 2015)

the camera, with a sly grin on her face[10]: all subtly masculine indices, particularly considering that it is quite unusual for women to be depicted in a training pose, against "a current conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity […] now more firmly entrenched in the notion of a muscu-lar physique" (*ibid.*: 51); muscularity seems indeed to be "the preserve of men" (*ibid.*).[11] On displaying a combination of masculine and

feminine indices, all these pictures implicitly play with and subvert assumptions based on gender.

This display of gender liminality may not appear to be consistently anti-normative if one focuses on the verbal and visual stress on the feminine side in reports on the celebrity's private life. Indeed, despite the fact that self-identification as transfeminine suggests an affiliation whose nature can vary considerably (see Zimman 2015), Cox seems to be adamant on the nature of that affiliation in *her* case, describing herself as "a black transgender chick from Mobile, Alabama" in a 2015 *Guardian* interview by Nicholson. Moreover, she is normally quoted and pictured as dating heterosexual men,[12] and this stress on her relationships with ostensibly heterosexual males could be regarded as a sort of political "domestication," even if unconsciously carried out, which may become exclusive of less mainstream forms of transgender identity, a sort of "hegemonic transgender identity." Very much in tune with Fleming's representation of current attitudes to transgender identity (2015), this may even appear as "a 'new equilibrium' in Gramscian terms, a point at which dominant discourses have opened up slightly to include those gender challenges (i.e. gender-conforming "wrong body" identities) that are the least threatening to dominant gender norms, while still maintaining a much more exclusionary/marginalising approach to identities that might provoke a rethinking of gender norms" (Barker-Plummer 2015). However, a close look at Cox's nude portrait in *Allure*,[13] which has been described by herself as another milestone for transgender representation ("I felt this could be really powerful for the communities that I represent," People 2015: 84), again seems to offer a much more complex and sophisticated picture.

While the unconventional depiction of a transgender person tastefully framed in black-and-white as a desirable body may, from a certain perspective, help shape society's opinion of transgender individuals in different terms, it may also, in stressing such a body as recognisably feminine, function as a gender spectacle for cis-audience consumption. Cox's lack of gaze is notable in the picture, and would seem to re-enforce the classic theory of the male gaze in post-Renaissance sexual imagery: "Men 'act' and women 'appear'. Men look at women. Women watch themselves, being looked at" (Berger 1972: 47). As a result, the story behind the

picture may function rather as an "ultimate makeover" than as a real gender challenge: "These narratives minimise gender ambiguities, queerness, racial, or other complexities, and present audiences with a heteronormative, gender-conforming identity which is then allowed to stand in for all kinds of trans experience. Such a limited representation does little to change dominant gender discourses or practices more generally" (Barker-Plummer 2015).

However commodifiable and commodified Cox's image may be as an object of external gaze, the discursive performance of femininity played in the picture does not strike as fully straightforward. Rather, it seems to project a model of masculinity-absorbing (or non-hegemonic) femininity; it seems to suggest a gender performance that cannot easily be pigeon-holed into a "neat" category and as such may easily become the subject and carrier of a strong and powerfully narrated "political" discourse. The first element that appears to break the visual script of femininity is the large, manly (despite wearing nail varnish) hand resting on Cox's forehead, which is made salient in the picture by being placed in the top-right corner, which foregrounds it. The same dissonant function seems to be achieved by the oil-smooth muscular limbs that appear to divide the image into different subsections, pointing to the hemp, monochrome (most probably grey) stone-washed sheets, which could, with a certain degree of verisimilitude, be more recognisable as "masculine" bedding than their silk, brightly coloured, or floral equivalents. As a model of masculinity-absorbing (or non-hegemonic) femininity, one may apply/adjust to Laverne Cox's case Green's judgement of female-to-male trans-people when commenting on Fertig's statement that the latter are "some of the sexiest men on the planet" (1995):

> [...] they are men who have the capacity to fully integrate feminine experience, qualities, and behaviors (however limited or unexpressed in their masculine psyches) without feeling threatened. They have a very real sense of the compatibility of the two extremes of gender because they have brought them together in dynamic combination, and they have found a home in their bodies for the conscious balance they have found in their psyches. For transmen, it is the bodily confirmation of the male identity that matters. Once that has been achieved to a transman's satisfaction, he can start to integrate his personality in the same ways that non-transpeople

do. Trans or nontrans, when individuals realize that they can give up the struggle of trying to prove who they are, or how butch they are, or how male, or how masculine, they can realize that whatever qualities of character they have, they are all part of the package. (Green 2005: 298–299)

Cox's nude portrait seems to beautifully integrate masculine and feminine as "part of the package," considerably contributing to the image of the media artist's unique sexiness while also making room for a view of gender as essentially fluid not only before but also after transition.

Equally powerful is Cox's more personal message, which only starts off as the typical account of a minority discursive position aiming to promote "self respect in the face of discredit" (842):

Running around Alabama in a zebra robe and a turban, I got bullied a lot. It was rough. When kids would bully me, I would say, "One day I will be rich and famous and I'll show you. And that's what got me through my childhood." (WWD 2014)

Indeed, the media artist's first-person performative (linguistic and visual) manifestations primarily seem to articulate a complex, forward-looking social agenda[14]:

I've gotten in trouble by saying this publicly, that most of the street harassment I've experienced has been from other black folks. [...] I think the reason for that is there is a collective trauma that a lot of black folks are dealing with in this country that dates back to slavery and to the Jim Crow South. [...]

I believe that a lot of black folks feel that there is this historic emasculation that has been happening in white supremacy of black male bodies. I think a lot of black folks dealing with a lot of post-traumatic stress see trans, my trans woman's body, and feel that I'm the embodiment of this historic emasculation come to life. [...]

I understand that as trauma. I have love. I have so much love for my black brothers and sisters who might call me out on the street, 'cause I get it. I understand. They're in pain.

I feel so often our oppressors are in a lot of, lot of pain. I think whenever someone needs to call out someone else for who they are, and make fun of them, it's because they don't feel comfortable with who they are. (Cox 2013)

Cox's criticism over the US census' inability to represent transgender people in its current form[15] and her *The T Word* documentary for MTV[16] are only the latest items on the list. This social agenda, presented as a mixture of *rapport*/private (connection-establishing, traditionally feminine) and *report*/public (negotiating and maintaining status, traditionally masculine) talk (Tannen 1990; also Seidler 1989), in Cox's interviews and talks, calls upon the philosopher and activist Cornel West as an inspirer and can be roughly summed up in the mantra "love is the answer": "What are we going to do about that? I think love is the answer. Cornel West reminds us that justice is what love looks like in public. I love that, because I feel that love, if we can love trans gender people, that will be a revolutionary act" (Cox 2013).

While mobilising such masculine indexical resources as articulate and informed languaging, and an assertive tone, Cox seems to distance herself from, and clearly place herself in contrast with, language indexing the model of rigid masculinity that urban men traditionally define themselves against. In lieu of toughness, it emphasises how crucial, powerful, and far-reaching an ideal of universal love can be, an objective that is, in Cox's intentions, targeted at social improvement at large: "'If I'm going to have a public platform, I want to use it not just to elevate myself but to elevate issues that are important to me' she says now" (Breen 2014). This appears as a conscious attempt at reversing the "othering" practices that dominant discourses often perform at the expense of all other competing discourses and producing a counter-discourse of wider social improvement based on the construction of "points of reference that are humanizing" and that help demystify difference, as well as placing the protection of children and self-help conversations across the differences at the heart of this process, as Cox's *Time* magazine interview and her Creating Change 2014 speech show. In the *Time* interview she was asked about an event where she had spoken in San Francisco. In that event a woman had brought with her a child named Soleil who had asked Cox about what to do about being bullied at school. Cox's reply in the interview was:

> What was really emotional for me is Soleil is six years old. I forget how young six years old is. Soleil is a baby and is being told that they can't be themselves. I think about when I was that age and my gender was being

policed and how deeply painful it was and how it made me feel like I was wrong, at my very core, that every instinct I had, to reach for this and be who I was, was wrong. And seeing Soleil, I just thought about how young six years old really is and how innocent six years old really is. And how we need to protect this child. And we need to protect our children from that and allow them to be themselves. (*Time* 2014)

The following excerpt is taken from Cox's Creating Change 2014 speech:

Some days I wake up and I'm that sixth grader who swallowed a bottle of pills because I did not want to be myself anymore because I did not know how to be anybody else. And who I was, I was told was a sin, a problem, and I didn't want to exist. Some days I wake up and I am that black, trans woman walking the streets of New York City hearing people yell, That's a man, to me.

And I understand, I've come to understand that when a trans woman is called a man, that is an act of violence.

[…]

We are more than our bodies. The criminalization of trans people is, is so pervasive in this culture. CeCe McDonald's case is one example, and I am sure many of you are aware of a sixteen-year-old girl in California by the name of Jewlyes Gutierrez. Sixteen years old and, and was bullied like so many transgender youth; 78% of trans youth in grades K-12 experience harassment and bullying in school. Seventy-eight percent—that is unacceptable. (Cox 2014)

In a recent paper, Lawson reminds us that "over the past 50 years, a large body of research has argued that masculinity and violence are closely related, especially in Western society" (2015: 53).[17] As Messner contends, the present model of masculinity no longer corresponds to the Terminator/Rambo model that arose as a "remasculinization of America" response to the Vietnam War (Jeffords 1989), and yet in the new model softness is still looked upon as definitely undesirable:

[…] the ascendant hegemonic masculinity combines the kick-ass muscular heroic male body with situationally expressive moments of empathy, grounded in care for kids and a capacity to make us all feel safe. Feminism,

anti-war movements, health advocates, and even modern business human relations management have delegitimized pure hypermasculinity. But many people still view effeminacy as illegitimate in men, especially those who are leaders. So, neither hard nor soft is fully legitimate, unless the two are mixed, albeit with a much larger dose of the former than of the latter. (2007: 469)

While clearly colluding with dominant masculinist discourses that value toughness and violence, Cox does not trade in one gender "norm" for another. Her fluid transgender identity, which, as hinted at above, seems to openly appropriate traditionally positive "masculine" indexing, seems to adjust this "not too hard not too soft" standard to her own personal context and personality, weaving it into a unique form of conscientious assertiveness which conjugates a strong, confident verbal and body language with a message of understanding and compassion, and a strongly and openly conveyed desire to change things for those who experience unfair hostility or overt oppression. Indeed, on the one hand, the media artist seems to authenticate her status as a woman through willingly accepting and valuing not only the loss of privilege that comes with being recognised as male but also the stigma that arises from the combination of the two minority conditions of femininity and blackness with the further, consciously acquired minority condition of having transitioned from male to female, which makes her a potential target for both male and female,[18] both white and black people's[19] verbal and physical aggressiveness. The unique form of hostility at the intersection of cis-sexism, transphobia, and misogyny that transwomen often experience is indeed further complicated for transwomen of colour like Cox by the intersection of "transmisogyny" (Serrano 2007)[20] with racism, a condition referred to as "misogynoir," since racism normally equals anti-blackness.

With the fictitious character played by Cox in *Orange Is the New Black* being similarly targeted, episode 12 in Season 3 is an excellent example of the type of complex transphobic attention a transgender male-to-female (let alone black) individual may receive, with three of Sophia Burset's fellow inmates asking to ascertain the truth of her sex, confronting her about her allegedly, unfairly privileged condition of "man" in a women's

prison and Sophia being sent to solitary confinement at the Security Housing Unit, "for her own protection" as a result[21]:

> […]
>
> [Reema] We just wanted to ask you a question. Spanish been saying how you still got your dick. That true?
>
> [Sophia sighs] What you got between your legs is your business—and what I got is mine.
>
> [Reema] Maybe. But my man is out at Lexington. He's having a real hard time. Hard. Meanwhile, you hiding out in here, "pretending" to be a female.
>
> [Gabby] Seems like you got it all figured out.
>
> [Sophia]You have any idea how ignorant you sound?
>
> [Gabby] We just want a little peek. Educate ourselves.
>
> [Sophia] Get the fuck out of my house.
>
> [Reema] Not till we see it. Fuck you, she-male! Damn, I told you he still had his man strength!
>
> [Sophia] Don't think I won't kill you, you fucking cunt!
>
> [Gabby] That's it, bitch! [Sophia grunting]
>
> [Sophia] Fuck you, bitches! Help me!
>
> [Sikowitz] I'll get Caputo.

Assertive transwomen, like Sophia—who has attained status at Litchfield as a professional—seem to be particularly targeted on the basis of their supposedly "male socialised behaviour." But Cox, like her fictitious persona, does not seem to choose to do without her natural (socially acquired as it may be) self-confidence to appear "more of a woman." Like the transmen Green describes, "who have the capacity to fully integrate feminine experience, qualities, and behaviors (however limited or unexpressed in their masculine psyches) without feeling threatened" (Green 2005: 298), she seems to have chosen to integrate this "masculine" index into her personal identity, her verbal and body language displaying a balance of compassion and determination, the latter being crucial for the former not to remain just a vague message of universal love for the world. She seems to have painted her need and invitation to social change on her body canvas, literally re-creating in her body that opening, that welcoming space, the cradle that a womb is so often described to be, while retaining a self-reliant posture which makes it only too clear that she will

not easily give in and surrender her dream of change; nor is she unaware of how the world goes. She is not a martyr, despite her incredible capacity of forgiveness (see her 2013 interview above, where she understands and justifies the hatred and violence she gets from her "black brothers" and from people in general as the result of trauma). She has gone a long way and faced the stigma of diversity as well as many forms of open hostility to defend her beliefs; she now seems to be willing to take the next step and ready to support others in their daily battles against discrimination and social injustice, making her cause a universal one, but she also appears to have it clear in her mind that strong and beautiful is better and achieves more than weak and plain. Her complex and fluid identity which can combine empathy with the ability to keep her feet firmly on the ground makes her an exceptional model of mediation, of gender shuttle diplomacy geared to social improvement. Cox may have contented herself to construct an alternative performance of manhood and womanhood and chosen to leave her gender performance at the stage of "mere" challenge to heteronormative masculinity and femininity, if not, from a different perspective, simply shaped for herself a form of hegemonic transgenderism, as hinted at above. In taking the path that makes her an advocate of diversity, making do with "just" empowering herself, she seems to have offered the world a potentially powerful resource for social improvement. One such model would indeed provide a sustainable paradigm as much for masculinity as for femininity, for the generations to come. Cox has broken down many barriers as a black transwoman artist, and because her professional status is recognised worldwide, her achievements are not just personal. They are political. They have a larger significance, as their reach is global and may affect other people's lives, making her message of universal love more alluring and, ipso facto, captivating.

3   Conclusion

In his recent article in *Nation* mentioned above (2015), Gevisser argues in the subtitle that "[t]he transgender movement is coming out—and bringing with it a deeper understanding of what it means to be human."

It is precisely this understanding of humanity (in the twofold meaning of "human" and "humane") that the personality focused on in this chapter seems to emphasise, encouraging the performance of social change through a verbal and body language that combines sensitivity and vigour, understanding and force.

In stressing current gender fluidity, Gevisser foregrounds the dangers lying around the corner for gradually more mainstream forms of transgendering:

> To be sure, an embrace of transgenderism and its possibilities might perversely serve to reinforce the binary: if you have a son whose identity falls outside the box of conventional masculinity, you can solve your "problems" by turning him into a girl; your sissy-boy can become a princess. The extreme example of this is Iran, where homosexuality is illegal but gender transition is legal and subsidized by the government. And evidence suggests that the government pressures some gay people to undergo gender-reassignment surgery. (325)

Siebler also seems to embrace this position, stating:

> […] trans people are, in fact, not queering binaries of sex/gender but reinforcing them. […] Today, especially in digital spaces, the binaries and sex/gender ideologies are the dominant narrative, a sharp and dichotomous contrast to the trans rhetoric of the 1970s–1980s. In the digital age, there are few representations of trans people who have *not* had surgeries and hormones to 'align' their gender with a constructed sex. (Siebler 2016: 131–132)

However, Gevisser also seems to foresee the possibility of a wider social impact of transgender identity and ultimately of its influence on patriarchy as well:

> Many of the genderqueer kids in today's liberal America are what Charlotte Wolf calls "transtrenders," using gender as a form of social provocation or sub-cultural bonding. The majority may later marry and assume the conventional gender roles, much as Japanese boys become company men after being allowed their very structured anime rebellion. But an increasing

number will stay in the borderlands and, in so doing, redraw our gender frontiers—and with them, the patriarchy itself. (*ibid.*)

Hardly anything has been written, to date, on how transgender identity may affect masculinity or femininity. This chapter has tried to start filling this gap, inviting reflection on how a specific instance of transgender identity which has recently brought international attention to the transgender community may help re-shape, or at least deconstruct the nexus between masculinity and violence, and simultaneously yield positive social consequences.

It remains to be seen if such a focus on social change is actually true of most forms of transgender identity (also see Di Nuzzo in this volume on this issue), and whether or not this aspect can (or will) ultimately be perceived as desirable and therefore appropriated (as is to be hoped) by mainstream forms of gender performance, in consideration of the "dialectical pragmatism" described by Demetriou:

> […] hegemonic masculinity appropriates from other masculinities whatever appears to be pragmatically useful for continued domination. The result of this dialectic is not a unitary pattern of hegemonic masculinity but a "historic bloc" involving a weaving together of multiple patterns, whose hybridity is the best possible strategy for external hegemony. A constant process of negotiation, translation, and reconfiguration occurs. (2001)

For the time being, after a number of outcries and scandals (Bohannon 2016), a recent study (Broockman and Kalla 2016) on prejudice, specifically focused on negative attitudes towards the transgender community, which appear to be more persistent than other forms of discrimination and as such urgently in need of investigation, has shown that "the canvassing strategy" can effectively influence biases, and the positive change recorded has been proved to last for a period of at least three months at the moment of writing. This strategy, a persuasion technique pioneered by the Los Angeles LGBT Center, implies the interviewed individual taking an analogic perspective aimed at awareness-raising: "By inviting someone to discuss an experience in which that person was perceived as different and treated unfairly, a canvasser tries to generate sympathy for the suffering of another group—such as gay or transgender people" (Bohannon 2016).

This brings new hope for the possibility of improving the personal lives of transgender individuals, and for the feasibility of widening the reach of the universal message of peace and understanding delivered by such an outstanding model of gender mediation as the one analysed in this chapter. This should in turn result in better understanding and respect for the multitude of ways that we are human.[22]

Notes

1. The term "Discourse" in this chapter refers to the use of language to convey ideas, based on the view that "discourse" does not conflate with "language use," but encompasses both language and life, thus revealing more, that is the world and our way of being in it. It corresponds to what Gee designates as Discourse (with a capital D): "[…] a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and artifacts, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network'" (Gee 1996 [1990]: 131).

2. "Languaging" is here meant as "the simultaneous process of continuing becoming of ourselves and of our language practices, as we interact and make meaning of the world," in a view of language as "an activity rather than a structure, as something we do rather than a system we draw on, as a material part of social and cultural life rather than an abstract entity" (Pennycook 2010: 2, 8).

3. Following Milani (2015a), I would actually say "people (both male- and female-identifying)."

4. To use a more traditional label, meant as "a broad umbrella term in common usage in many community settings, recognizing the many debates over appropriate terms and terminology as all raising important points about the need to depathologize and recognize difference among people who may or may not see themselves falling under its purview" (Matte and Johnson 2009: 44).

5. To opt for a more recent definition, meant as "people who by their self-identities, behaviors, relationships, desires, public presentation, or attractions, do not fit mainstream normative sexuality or gender" (Eliason 2014: 163).

6. Sophia is actually incarcerated because she stole credit cards in order to pay for sex-reassignment surgery.

7. It was not possible to obtain permission to reproduce this image, but it can be found online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nicholas-snow/laverne-cox-time-magazine_b_7238884.html

8. "Transituated strategic discourse" queering the binaries in Cromwell's terms (Cromwell 2006 [2001]).

9. Photographer Emily Hope generously allowed free reproduction of the picture she took for *Variety*.

10. It was not possible to obtain permission to reproduce this image, but it can be found online (at the time of publishing) at http://ew.com/article/2015/06/10/laverne-cox-entertainment-weekly-cover

11. On this topic, also see Nelson (1994), Birrell and Cole (1994), Kolnes (1995), Halbert (1997), Choi (2000), Russell (2007), and the definition of the female athlete as deviant in Veri (1999).

12. See, for example, The Huffington Post (2016 [2015]) and US Magazine (2016).

13. It was not possible to obtain permission to reproduce this image, but it can be found online at http://www.papermag.com/see-laverne-coxs-stunning-nude-portrait-for-allure-1427540754.html

14. The Promotional Trailer for FREE CeCe! is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pW8oHJ7zqg&t=10s. The video from the public dialogue with bell hooks at The New School is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oMmZIJijgY

15. The video from Wochit News is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzxuD3qtE48

16. The documentary is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDy0DhfuxfI&t=496s

17. Also see the "toughness" masculine ideology expressed in freestyle rap performances (Williams 2015).

18. See Michael (2015), (Steinmetz 2015), and the experience narrated by Thom: "The idea is that transwomen, with our 'masculine' bodies and having been 'raised as male,' receive all kinds of privilege that ciswomen don't, such as relative safety from sexual harassment, social preference in school and the job market, and so on. As a result of this perspective, transwomen are often excluded from women-only spaces on the basis that we might be violent, or make ciswomen uncomfortable, or that we are already served by male institutions" (Thom 2015).

19. See Cox (2013) above.
20. Transmisogyny is a controversial concept: central in transfeminism and intersectional feminist theory but rejected by those feminists who do not see transwomen as female.
21. A short video from episode 12, Season 3 of "*Orange Is the New Black*" is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sC6VA--cNs
22. Ultimately, for the ineffability of the other, "who is not disclosed through speech but leaves a portentous shard of itself in its saying, a self that is beyond discourse itself" (Butler 2015 [2001]: 192).

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