



PERIÓDICUS

ISSN: 2358-0844

n. 22, v. 1  
jul.-ago.2025  
p. 108-126

# “Identity” in perspective: the place of independent artistic creation for brazilian trans\* people

*(Identidade em perspectiva: o lugar da criação artística independente para pessoas trans\* brasileiras)*

*(Identidad en perspectiva: el lugar de la creación artística independiente para personas trans\* brasileñas)*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article contrasts two perspectives on trans\* identity: one rooted in medical-scientific discourse and the other grounded in critical approaches. It begins with a brief literature review on the construction of the “transsexual” category in the West, shaped largely by medical-scientific knowledge. It then introduces a critical perspective influenced by Queer studies. The analysis draws on interviews with five Brazilian trans\* artists, interpreting their experiences through this critical lens. The article emphasizes that independent artistic creation serves as a process of self-recognition, world interpretation, and the formation of bonds and affections that foster existence. These artistic practices embody care and resistance, challenging conventional understandings of trans\* identity.

**KEYWORDS:** Trans art; Trans identity; Artistic creation; Independent art; Transsexuality.

**Resumo:** O objetivo deste artigo é contrapor duas diferentes perspectivas sobre a “identidade” trans\*: uma sob a ótica médico-científica e, a outra, sob uma ótica crítica. Para tal, apresentamos, em primeiro momento, uma breve revisão bibliográfica acerca da constituição da categoria “transexual” no Ocidente, forjada sobretudo pelo saber médico-científico; em segundo momento, apresentamos uma perspectiva crítica inspirada nos estudos Queer para, enfim, em terceiro momento, interpretar trechos de entrevistas realizadas com cinco artistas trans\* brasileiros, sob essa perspectiva crítica. O artigo aponta para a compreensão de que o lugar da criação artística independente pode ser visto como um processo de reconhecimento de si, de interpretação do mundo e de criação de laços e afetos favoráveis às suas existências, desempenhando processos de cuidado e de resistência dentro de uma perspectiva diferente da chamada identidade trans\*.

**Palavras-chave:** Arte trans; Identidade trans; Criação artística; Arte independente; Transexualidade.

**Resumen:** El objetivo de este artículo es contraponer dos perspectivas diferentes sobre la “identidad” trans\*: una desde la óptica médico-científica y otra desde una óptica crítica. Para ello, primero presentamos una breve revisión bibliográfica sobre la constitución de la categoría “transexual” en Occidente, forjada principalmente desde el saber médico-científico; en segundo lugar, presentamos una perspectiva crítica inspirada en los estudios Queer; y, finalmente, en tercer lugar, interpretamos fragmentos de entrevistas realizadas a cinco artistas trans\* brasileños, bajo esta perspectiva crítica. El artículo apunta a la comprensión de que el espacio de la creación artística independiente puede ser visto como un proceso de autoconocimiento, de interpretación del mundo y de creación de vínculos y afectos favorables a sus existencias, desempeñando procesos de cuidado y resistencia dentro de una perspectiva diferente a la llamada identidad trans\*.

**Palabras clave:** Arte trans; Identidad trans; Creación artística; Arte independiente; Transexualidad.

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Recebido em 23/11/2024  
Aceito em 30/05/2025

## 1 Introduction

The term “trans\*”<sup>2</sup> retains its etymological roots, signifying movement, crossing, or passage. As a prefix, it conveys processes such as transporting, conducting, transiting, traveling, transmitting, surpassing, or overflowing. As a direct transitive verb, “to overflow” suggests that boundaries have been crossed or territories exceeded. As an indirect transitive verb, it refers to being full to the point of excess. Transgender, transsexual, transgressed: the body is crossed, and it crosses; the body overflows, brimming with agency<sup>3</sup>. Yet, if the body is inherently multiple and mutable, why confine it within the fixed lens of a trans\* identity?

In this article, we explore two distinct approaches to understanding the contextual uses of transitional gender “identity.” The first examines the hegemonic frameworks (Butler, 2011) surrounding the Western category of “transsexuality,” shaped predominantly by medical and scientific discourse, in order to contextualize and interrogate its underlying assumptions. We then adopt a critical perspective informed by Queer studies to consider how individuals within this “identity” navigate their daily lives and exercise agency, with a focus on artistic creation. Here, identity is framed not as a categorical boundary, but as a fluid process of self-recognition, world interpretation, and the creation of bonds and affections among those who share this perspective.

We present insights from trans\* artists about their creative processes, which we understand as autonomous expressions of personal imaginaries shaped by their circumstances and life trajectories inscribed within “identity.” For this analysis, we selected excerpts from semi-structured<sup>4</sup> interviews with five Brazilian trans\* artists from diverse fields, regions, social classes, and professions, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 – Profile of interviewees

* 1	27	Gender	Education	Self-Declaration of Race	Class	City	Occupation	Artistic modality
		Non-Binary	Complete higher education	White	Lower middle	São Carlos (SP)	Clinical and social psychology	Writing and dance
2	28	Trans masculine	Complete high school	Pardo	Low	Bauru (SP)	Freelance artist	Visual arts, musician

2 The use of an asterisk following the word “trans” is a convention adopted in both digital social media and academic discourse (Tompkins, 2014, p. 26; Halberstam, 2023). This notation goes beyond an “umbrella” identity for binary expressions of masculinity or femininity; it also signals openness to a range of gender identities, including transvestites, “boycectas,” non-binary individuals, queer, agender, intersex, androgynous people, among others. In this text, we adopt the term with the graphic symbol for the same inclusive purpose.

3 Agency is understood here as a movement that expands the possibilities of the axes of connection, like a rhizome (Deleuze; Guattari, 2011, p. 14), without a trunk, beginning, center, verticality, coherence, or end.

4 All interviews are part of a broader investigation and were carried out with the acceptance of a Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE) under the criteria of CEP/CONEP resolution 510, of April 7, 2016.



3	24	NB trans masculine	Incomplete higher education	White	Lower middle	Fortaleza (CE)	Tattoo artist	Visual arts
4	26	T r a n s masculine “transviado” (non-conforming)	Incomplete higher education	White	Middle	Santos (SP)	Student	Audio-visual
5	27	NB	Incomplete higher education	White	Middle	Bauru (SP)	Designer	3D art

Source: elaboration by the author.

In these dialogues, we aim to understand the role of the creative process for bodies that, while shaped by societal assumptions, carve out new possibilities for themselves and their communities. Through artistic creation, they materialize life and difference, using this practice as one of several strategies for care, resistance, and defiance. The significance of their statements lies not merely in the individuality of their narratives, but in the collective process of subject formation they reveal – negotiating and challenging frameworks of existence while offering new perspectives on a social reality that is silenced, marginalized, and disqualified (Lima, 2022, p. 9).

This understanding positions creative work as an accessible and viable means of countering the delegitimization and disqualification often imposed on marginalized ways of life, particularly those shaped by subalternity (Spivak, 2010). It enables the sharing of diverse forms of existence, even within the intimate spaces of self-reflection (Lima, 2022). Considering agency, even in its most modest and microscopic forms (Deleuze, 2013, p. 181), challenges the notion that the body is merely a passive site where power and control are exercised (Preciado, 2019), while also acknowledging the violence that permeates bodily subjectivity, both as a receiver and producer of meaning.

Finally, to contribute to gender studies, particularly at the intersection of communication and sociology, we do not propose a semiotic analysis of individual artistic creations, but rather an understanding of the act (Latour, 2012) of artistic processes as a whole. These processes are influenced by the broader social stage, including the pathologization of identity, yet they generate infinitely open creations that disrupt and reshape that very stage. The final artistic product emerges as the culmination of a dynamic interaction in which both the artwork and the subjects are mutually transformed (Colling, 2021, p. 27).



## 2 The framing and establishment of a medical “identity”

Asserting the existence of a definitive history of trans\* identity is a tenuous endeavor, given the challenges of documenting the experiences of a community that has been systematically erased from traditional historical narratives, relegated to the status of a disposable Other (Deleuze, 2013, p. 123).

Any attempt to construct a singular narrative that seeks a fixed origin and asserts indivisibility, especially concerning a population that does not conform to an essentialist, Cartesian, modern, or “pure” self, inevitably results in the erasure of alternative memories and versions of that history. However, this does not invalidate the need to address the path through which transsexuality was constructed as a medical, psychiatric, and scientific category. Like sex and sexuality, the concept of transgender/transsexuality has been contested across fields such as physiology, biotechnology, and, most notably, psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychiatry (Bento, 2017).

Hegemonically<sup>5</sup>, before the emergence of a cultural identity such as “trans\*” – an evolving and contested imaginary (Rancière, 2018) concerning how certain bodies are understood – scientific notions about these bodies shaped conceptions that determined their legitimacy and legibility. These conceptions continue to produce and perpetuate violence and abjection in the present.

People who do not conform to the gender norms of modernity/coloniality have long been subjected to punishments and standardizations, allocated in places of inferiority, perversity, illness. Modern biomedical knowledge [...] instituted models of normality and, consequently, of abnormalities. In the case of gender dissidence, in the binary and generalist Western molds, we perceive this standardization with poignancy (Pfeil; Pfeil, 2023, p. 97).

Jorge Leite Júnior (2008), through a genealogical analysis tracing developments from antiquity to the consolidation of “modern” biomedical/scientific (and media) knowledge, notes that even before the institutionalization of transsexuality as psychopathology, there were manifestations analogous to what would later be defined as an incongruence between sex and gender. The earliest Western parallel to this concept was the androgynous figure (or “hermaphrodite”), a Platonic symbol of “sexual ambiguity,” revered in ancient times as a magical, divine being – a “privileged monster” that defied certainties and boundaries of the body through its fantastical form.

By the Humanist Renaissance, however, this ambiguity was reconfigured in parallel with the development of scientific knowledge and the increasing influence of Christian religious power. This power enforced a gendered social order, in which gender was determined by the alignment

<sup>5</sup> “Hegemonically” because there are clues about the existence of corporealities in the past that can now be interpreted as trans\* existences. These, even if they achieved visibility in the publicized debate, were not yet classified as “transsexual” or “transgender” since this is a medical category, as presented in this section.



of sex (defined by genitals) with prescribed norms, such as specific clothing, behaviors, and social roles. Deviations from these norms could result in persecution, torture, or even death, with power operating as “the informal element that passes between or beneath forms of knowledge” (Deleuze, 2013, p. 126).

According to Thomas Laqueur (2001), until the 18th century, when modern scientific knowledge/power was still undergoing a process of dense consolidation, the idea that there was a single physiological sex, with two genders hierarchized in their social performativity, reigned in Western culture. It was believed that male and female genitals were essentially the same, with the difference being whether the organs were inside or outside the body. If a mother possessed enough “vital heat” and adhered to spiritual norms, her fetus would fully develop into a male with external genitals. Otherwise, the child would be female, seen as an “incomplete man,” lacking in both spiritual and physical development. This conceptual framework reduced women to failed men, confining sex to the limits of genital anatomy.

During this period, European modernity – where “truth” was structured through binary oppositions like body/mind and nature/culture – conceived of distinct and complementary sexes, feminine and masculine, male and female. The order of the sexes followed the new political, economic, technological, scientific, and epistemological order: the androgynous figure was redefined as the pseudo-hermaphrodite monster, a psychosexual abnormality. This figure became the “great ancestor of many gender identities that emerged in the 20th and 21st centuries, including transvestites, transsexuals, drag queens, drag kings, intersex individuals, and crossdressers” (Leite Júnior, 2008, p. 31), all of whom were subjected to systems of control, surveillance, and oppression (Pfeil; Pfeil, 2022, p. 150).

Berenice Bento (2006), skeptical of the “universal” and “official” notions of the “True Transsexual,” situates this “transsexual invention” within the medical-scientific context. The concept of the “psychic transsexual” first emerged in 1910 when sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term “fetishistic transvestite” and later introduced the term “transsexualism” in 1919. However, the term gained wider recognition only in 1949 when sexologist David O. Cauldwell applied it to classify a “male transsexual”.

In the 1950s, transsexuality became institutionalized as a medical-psychiatric pathology. It was framed as a device of domination and control, shaped by a white, heterosexist, cisnormative, compulsory, and patriarchal framework (Pfeil; Pfeil, 2023). Regulatory practices mediated the discursive and disciplinary treatment of bodies, reinforcing normative ideals.

In other words, the development of medical knowledge had to be accompanied by a gender-



affirming treatment: in 1953, endocrinologist Harry Benjamin confronted the need to systematize the clinical use of hormonal compounds in the treatment of sex reassignment (Preciado, 2018, p. 30). He suggested in “Transvestism and Transsexualism” that transgenitalization surgery would be the only viable therapeutic form for transsexuality, contradicting health professionals who were reluctant to consider “body mutilation” as a treatment/cure at the time. This conduct followed the biological constitution of gender adaptation, although it opened space for the possibility of considering psychic genderification (Lima, 2022):

Such symptoms would be centered on the abjection of one’s own body, especially the genitals, and the desperate desire to ‘transition’ socially and physically to the opposite gender, almost like changing teams. According to this logic, the only possible ‘treatment’ for ‘true transsexuals’ would be transgenital surgery. No therapy could reverse the transsexuality of a ‘true transsexual’ (Pfeil; Pfeil, 2022, p. 155).

As early as 1955, concepts surrounding gender began to take shape. Building on Talcott Parsons’ Theory of Social Roles, John Money, a professor of psychopediatrics at Johns Hopkins University Hospital, proposed that the “gender” or “sexual identity” of intersex infants could be modified up to 18 months of age (Bento, 2006, p. 40-41). This idea introduced the significant role of socialization – mediated by science and core institutions – in shaping sexual difference, challenging the perspective of Robert Stoller, who believed transsexuality should be addressed solely through psychological means, according to established gender norms of masculinity or femininity (Bento; Pelúcio, 2012; Preciado, 2018, p. 29). Once formulated, the medical concept of gender identity became closely linked to transsexuality, particularly with the founding of the Gender Identity Clinic at Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1966.

Despite acknowledging the role of socialization in the shaping of gender, medical practices and theories continued to prioritize the biological dimensions of the body in understanding gender transition. Even Money, with the “revolutionary” observation that emphasized the empirical physicality of medicine, maintained that the origin of transsexuality lay in a brain anomaly that rendered bodily performance incongruent with the “truth” of genital sex. In 1973, he coined the term “gender dysphoria”<sup>6</sup> to describe this phenomenon (Bento, 2006, p. 42-43). This diagnosis, still widely used today, has been universalized through international medical congresses and associations, perpetuating the notion of the “true transsexual.”

There is no consensus among the Standards of Care (SOC), Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), and International Classification of Diseases (ICD) – the main manuals for pathologizing trans\* identity – regarding the pathological definition of transsexuality

<sup>6</sup> Included in the DSM-III in 1980 and still present in its last volume (DSM-V), published in 2013.





(Pfeil; Pfeil, 2022, p. 155-159). Within the establishment of normality highlighting these contradictions becomes a narrative effort that locates and provides comprehensive indexes for interpreting and mapping the crossings of certain bodies, emphasizing the past temporal event over the state that is present in relationships, to “offer an account of how an explanation and a narrative of reality were established as normative” (Spivak, 2010, p. 48).

No field exists without history, and no body exists without memory. What legitimizes the erasure or silencing of certain narratives, especially those produced by the subjects themselves? In light of the invisibility of their voices and the mechanisms of control imposed upon them, what rights can be claimed or contested?

Despite the rigid bureaucratic and institutional frameworks imposed by biomedical knowledge, no universal understanding of trans\* bodies has emerged. Instead, such frameworks have reinforced subordinate conceptions, denying subjects the autonomy to define their own corporeality. Even today, control over these bodies remains in the hands of external authorities, maintaining the trans\* individual as a figure perceived as incapable, trapped between the mirror of science and that of society.

While modern science presents itself as a totalitarian model that denies other types of knowledge, universal humanity denies other possibilities of the subjective and corporeal constitution that do not reflect the universal subject of modernity, namely: the cisgender, white, heterosexual, endosex, non-disabled man, of Judeo-Christian origin, property owner. The category of humanity is, in itself, dehumanizing, as it advocates that certain bodies are less human than others (Pfeil; Pfeil, 2023, p. 99).

Culture exerts its influence on individuals, shaping them according to its laws, and producing “a body capable of developing in a social space, in a productive space, for which [they are] responsible” (Guattari; Rolnik, 1996, p. 278). As a consequence, the eviction, humiliation, and shame intertwined with social experience are far from new, especially when directed at the bodies of transvestites, Black trans\* women, and sex workers. Up until 2023, Brazil held the grim distinction of being the country with the highest number of murders and human rights violations against trans\* people worldwide, for fifteen consecutive years.

Despite this, access to and analysis of primary data on these murders – made available by initiatives such as Transrespect Versus Transphobia (TvT Worldwide)<sup>7</sup> – continues to be neglected. The brutal nature of these killings<sup>8</sup> does not appear to unsettle prevailing societal norms, nor do they provoke any meaningful effort to repress the conduct that fuels such violence. Instead, these

<sup>7</sup> These include identification of name, age, occupation, date of death, city, country, location, cause, and details about each murder.

<sup>8</sup> Among these are listed various violent forms of death such as incineration, strangulation, stabbing, disfigurement of faces, and, above all, genitals.



acts of brutality reinforce those norms, reducing the complexity of individual desires to simplistic interpretations of identity constrained by biological essentialism (Foucault, 1999; Bento, 2012, p. 97).

The categorization of identity, as outlined by medical and psychological specialists, reaches its limits when they attempt to definitively determine who these individuals are. Processes of identification and disidentification are always insufficient, constrained by externally imposed categories. Yet, it is precisely in the recognition of these constraints that subjects – despite their multiplicity and differences – can mobilize, envision new possibilities, and collectively redefine their paths in the face of the precariousness of their existence.

### 3 Perspectives of “identity” for those whose lives are intertwined with the concepts of identity

Stuart Hall (2008) engaged with cultural, feminist, and post-structuralist critiques, particularly up until the early 1990s. The author demonstrated that any idea or concept rooted in identity cannot be transcended without a dialectical process. Identity, as we have seen, is not a pre-discursive attribute derived from the inherent qualities or will of the subject but rather a construct shaped by the social, cultural, and political dynamics that permeate it. Therefore, the mere wish for the erasure of the term’s negativity is insufficient. To understand the place and the necessity of identity or identification for collectives such as trans\* people, it is first crucial to acknowledge their differences, their past and present articulations, and the possible strategies they may adopt. For these bodies, identity is not fixed; rather, it is a useful and context-specific tool, undeniable in its articulation of difference. In this sense, political subjects mobilize new perspectives on identity.

We can assert that in the political use of trans\* identity, this mode of existence is not “a disembodied or purely discursive point of view” (Connell, 2016, p. 38). It is embodied, hybridized, and mixed, lacking definitive boundaries. This openness allows the creation of new ways of experiencing the body and of living. Thus, trans\* identity breaks away from the hegemonic and rigid categories of identity described earlier.

Furthermore, the political translation (Habib, 2021, p. 40) of Queer studies on the body as marked by “identity” suggests new ways of seeing and understanding. While it is challenging to determine a precise temporal origin for the notion of Queer, one prevailing conception is that it emerged as a popular movement – a form of recognition, investigation, or even diagnosis – from the critical and provocative impulses that followed feminist, black, and homosexual movements, the Stonewall riots, and the ACT UP movement in New York, among other civil rights mobilizations





(Leopoldo, 2020).

However, the aim was never to normalize homosexuality or to promote the acceptance of bodily and existential “diversity,” nor to establish a Queer “identity.” Instead, this critical movement sought to challenged the normalization of the subject and the process of identity normalization (Louro, 2001). Gender, like sexuality, was perceived as the outcome of performative actions in specific temporal, geographical, social, and bureaucratic contexts. In other words, gender does not possess an essence or ontological status independent of its material expression; its actions continually reproduce the roles of masculinity or femininity as constructed through sociocultural relations (Butler, 2003).

A Queer-inspired perspective, then – as a critical recognition of subaltern identities – opens space for thinking about the loss of an essential self through radical alterity (Benetti, 2013, p. 9) by refusing the notion of a subject endowed with fixed humanity, form, and gestures (Haraway, 1993, p. 277), as inscribed by hegemonic categorical frameworks. These postulations on subjectivity reject the idea of normalcy, which relegates those outside it to the position of the Other (Kilomba, 2019).

In Global South contexts, where these ideas have served as arenas for political struggle and intellectual contestation, Queer perspectives aim to denaturalize compulsory and rigid norms (Pelúcio, 2014). Queerizing a perspective involves casting doubt on the seemingly tolerant, horizontal idea of diversity. Here, the material translation of the term does not lie in its linguistic meaning but through an active political stance, challenging “cisheteronormative and phallogentric structures in legal, biomedical, educational spheres, employability struggles, among others” (Habib, 2021, p. 30). It is a process of contestation from the margins, a disruption of repetition (Pereira, 2006). Understanding this critical process enables us to see that within the flexible constructions of masculinity and femininity recognized in public and social spaces, being trans\* is no more or less performative (Butler, 2003) than being cisgender. It involves a bodily performance congruent with, yet not reducible to, the social understanding of sex based on genitalia.

Finally, gender is not merely a performative act or a product of linguistic practices; it materializes in bodies (Preciado, 2014, p. 24). It is not enough to affirm the existence of a socially constructed first or second sex. What differentiates life experiences are the systems of convention to which we attribute norms, discursive, and bodily practices, where “the subject acquires social intelligibility and political recognition” (Preciado, 2018, p. 121) through constant negotiation, transmission, and transition. In this sense, gender as “identity” is less an ontological fact and more a collective practice embedded in power structures and relations (Connell, 2016, p. 17).



#### 4 Creation as the impulse of perspective

After briefly examining the normative frameworks of trans\* existence and the political reinterpretation of identity, we turn to one of the possible strategies of resistance articulated by these bodies: artistic creation. Beginning with the enunciations of these subjects invites us to understand the fractures, the ruptured intimacies, and the gaps mended by practices and positions through which the subject reveals themselves to the world. Appearing where suffering is anticipated becomes an act of performatively sculpting, a continuous process of constructing and reconstructing the self (Butler, 1997) within a world of imaginaries whose meanings are suggested and controlled by hegemonic norms.

The processes of memory and recollection, even in their most intimate forms, hold particular importance, as the violence and shadows of a past governed by medical-scientific frameworks (Foucault, 1999) are ever-present. Art and structure affect the same foundational territory: the self that produces them. In the creative act, the subject turns inward, reflexively gathering abstract meanings that will later materialize, depending on the method chosen.

Sometimes, this is a movement of relief, shaping a subjectivity that longs for expression without a predetermined purpose. This self becomes a new field of receptivity, embracing the novelty of a view born of deep emotion. Its cause remains profoundly personal, inextricable from lived histories, evoked by feelings, pains, and pleasures of embodied existence. It emerges as a form of understanding – though not always desired or fully perceptible – that seeks to release and overflow what defies words or explanation, offering an opening to the self and the elements that constitute it:

[Creating is like]<sup>9</sup> *a conversation-letting off steam, you know? In the sense of just expressing what I'm feeling without much purpose at first. But something always ends up coming out of it that leads to something, that leads to a new construction of myself [...]* *It's the anguish that wants to come out, the relief of being able to get in touch with what I'm feeling* (1).

[Creating] *is a bit of my own thing and at the same time [something] to externalize an intuition, [...] it's a kind of therapeutic thing, which I don't know how to put into words. [...] as I had some experiences that were a bit... a bit... strong, impactful, right at the beginning of my life when I was a child and so on... it was then that art started to come as a gateway to remove some triggers that life gives me* (2).

This dissolution of a fixed self in the act of creation, grounded in self-memory, can become a means of exploring the subject's personal presence and representation (Foucault, 2004). It operates as a therapeutic process, accessing the past through touch, with the self lingering in the seams and folds of lived experience – created, recreated, and resignified without confining it to a

<sup>9</sup> The words in brackets were not stated by the people interviewed. They were inserted to contextualize previous excerpts from the interviews not contained in this text.



single interpretation. This process opens the possibility of reimagining oneself.

Here, body and social context, intention and hesitation, wounds, triggers, and moments of relief engage in a dynamic dialogue. Although individual and particular, this internal impulse often speaks, in each artist's unique way, to a significance that transcends the artwork itself – the index (Gell, 2020), the artifact, the visible, the text, the performance. It underscores that the process of expressing meanings, emotions, validations, and personal affirmations is as essential as the creations themselves. In this sense, art becomes a conduit for turning inward and expressing outward (Lima, 2022).

The subjectivity achieved in this process reawakens the subject, providing a new mode of understanding and communicating what one wishes to represent differently in a world where there is no straightforward validation for identities that intersect and transcend rigid frameworks:

*There's a lot of feeling there. It's like a drawing of mine that says 'it's so intense, but they told me it's normal.' What I felt was very intense, but I couldn't talk about it and get the validation I needed. I don't even need that validation, but it was frustrating. I needed my [validation], so the way I could get the validation of what I needed was by drawing! I often felt like I was overflowing with something that I couldn't handle anymore, especially because I couldn't talk to anyone. It's as if putting it on paper was a way of relieving that limit, what I was feeling [...] That which I kept repeating [...] It was also a form of bleeding (3).*

Therefore, art appears as a form of care, a process of liberation and healing that relieves emotional burdens:

*[Creation is] something that comes with passion, easily... a very strong emotional bond. [...] I started drawing when I was very depressed. I bought painting canvases, acrylic paint and started drawing on the boards, lots of boards. And they were very liberating for the time. It was a very difficult time; nothing was happening, and I was only receiving psychiatric and psychological care. And what really helped me get out of bed was drawing. I would get very frantic thinking about the next painting, which is what brought me to the activity (4).*

Skin, bones, flesh, blood – access persists, boundaries are transgressed, and narratives overflow. Beginning from the territory of trans\* corporeality and the vulnerable senses that seldom find an obvious place in the world, creation emerges from the daily submersion in private pain and reaches a realm of resistance, countering stagnation and repetition by affirming existence through creative imagination, catharsis, and lived experience.

Self-affirmation through creation reconfigures memories marked by trauma, shame, and silence. While it does not entirely transform the macrosocial structures that observe them, creation establishes an ethics of responsibility, weaving life's movements with connections to others who experience similar circumstances. This becomes a critical reassessment of identity's circumstantial uses. Here, movement becomes not only necessary but achievable in the face of suffering's scale,



and the collective results of these creative mobilizations may evoke the solidarity and affection of their peers:

*It is very interesting to think that art is this thing that moves me... it is what mobilizes me because I think it arises precisely from a paralysis [...] of when I need to get out of this hole, so let's see how I can do that, [...] otherwise I will be stuck here forever. [...] Normally I produce more [art] when I am sad, you know? [...] I don't know why, I think it is precisely because of all this background [...] I felt very bad about being in that environment where I could not be myself, where my name did not exist [...] and an imaginary value was attributed to an escape. An escape from reality, from which there is no way out. There is no way [...], otherwise I might kill myself, you know? So that's it, that's what I have left (3).*

*I don't know if I would say [that art offers] a solution, but I think it is a great resource. A necessary resource, which was developed as a form of survival. Also [and so] that I can offer other people what I could not have (1).*

The process of attributing meaning to one's own experiences opens a path to a language that not only engages with the world but also offers new frameworks for interpreting bodies beyond cisgender norms – the very norms that often underlie their suffering. This framework, shaped by those who live these realities, allows for new meanings and signifiers surrounding the fluidity of the body and gender, now recognized as viable possibilities that actively reshape reality rather than immobilize it:

*[At] the same time that I am very ill, I am in need of a catharsis. Sometimes I feel like I can only produce when I'm feeling really bad [...] I see beauty through this feeling that I'm conveying there. But it's a lot of resistance to get to that place. It's hard to open up to yourself, even more so to open up to paper. These are moments when it's possible to make a mark on your life (4).*

*The creative process is very difficult. Within everything you can do, you get lost in the possibility of everything. So when you have this dialogue with what you're living and going through, it gives you a direction (5).*

The pathways forged through creation provide a space for self-encounter within each artistic experiment, even when not explicitly centered on trans\* themes. By opening avenues for life, reflection, and re-signification, the creative process sustains the formation of shared subjectivities in a world lacking clear opportunities for self-recognition.

When narratives and references grounded in a strictly cisgender social imaginary are asserted, what will serve as their reflection? Recognizing the world as a window – a narrow view into broader meanings – artistic creation takes on an investigative role, aiming to build spaces for trans\* people. It becomes a deliberate process of shaping new imaginaries, blending existing memories and insights, and seeking a place for both identification and disidentification.

*It is about these [cis] narratives that people have always talked about. I think what is different is the silencing. It is the inequality that exists between one narrative and another. So for us, there is a return of who we are, of what our position in the world is. Maybe for cis people, this is established in a way... maybe it is not an effort to have to do this, to have to live off art, to have to appear in spaces, occupy spaces, etc. I think there is a*



*more active positioning in this sense; [...] my ‘discovery’ also came through other people who expressed themselves through art, whether through dance and vogue, or through performances with clothing, playing with androgyny, with makeup, or even [digital influencers] who talk about it in a more educational way (1).*

*For us who are trans, it has a very big, very different weight, and this is independent of whether you make art related to your trans experience or not. [...] I think that when we look at the subjective, there is always something to do with it, at the same time as it is not... [...] it is a bit of anguish, but also a bit of happiness (3).*

If the establishment of identities in the world is based on reflexive practices (both creative and violent) of belonging, and if transsexuality/transgenderism is positioned as the opposite pole of a biologically appropriate embodiment of sex, the corresponding category, cissexuality/cisgenderism, must also be ethically named, since it is based on continuous epistemological foundations.

According to Beatriz P. Bagagli<sup>10</sup>, in 2002, Emi Koyama continued the naming of cisgenderism by American trans\* activists, coined in the 1990s to decentralize a dominant group and position it only as another possible alternative for gender expressions. Is the norm, by chance, devoid of a name?

In the words of Viviane Vergueiro (2015), “naming the standard, these genders seen as natural, cisgender, can represent a decolonial shift in thinking about gender identities” and regulatory norms since it takes away their supposed referential and desirable naturalness. According to Hailey Kaas (2012), naming cis is the same political process as naming trans\* since it points out and specifies this form of existence that is considered the only and indivisible one belonging to the social field (Moira, 2017). Cisnormativity, more than just an identity framework, operates as a regulatory system that shapes and restricts the bodies existing beyond its boundaries:

*[The field of trans arts] is a very specific cultural niche, and I think it is extremely important for us to find other people like us... because we do not identify with everything from cis and straight, cisgender culture. And, in fact, it can be an extremely toxic thing for us. It's a very strong process of assimilation. Mainly finding representation that is not just visual; but coming from a world logic that is never like ours. This visibility is [as] fundamental for us as it is for any identity. But for us, I feel that if this didn't exist – as it didn't exist before as it is today – the processes of marginalization would be much worse. Maybe people would never know that they are transmasculine. I know that I discovered that I am a transmasculine person through the work of other people. If they hadn't given me that name, maybe I would never even have known (4).*

*I think that cis artists don't care about trans artists, in a way. They don't care about making art that includes trans people, you know? But trans people do care. Since you are producing as a trans person, you want trans people to read it. This involves how you are going to produce it! And both trans people and cis people will see it. I think there is a difference here: I have never seen a cis artist represent trans bodies, or if I have seen it, it is very little. Now, trans people represent trans bodies and not only! They are careful to represent us in a certain way (5).*

10 In an open class about cisgender studies.



Due to divergences in the existential territories of identity classification, a persistent suspicion lingers toward a world that fails to tell narratives aligned with these spaces of belonging. Contrary to the normative expectations of gendered roles – such as the virile, providing man or the caring, submissive woman – trans\* identity is rooted in transition and fluidity. Its history has largely remained outside the spaces of socialization and shared imaginaries, surfacing only through restrictive, medicalizing, or unintelligible representations.

When created by trans\* people, artistic mobilization reflects a conscious effort to craft narratives that meaningfully articulate their subjectivity. This mobilization involves building recognizable symbols that transform subtlety into resistance. It organizes difference with purpose, through actions oriented toward a displaced future. While some past records exist, these are not hegemonic, validated, or held as sources of inspiration. We find ourselves shaped by identity, visibility, identification, knowledge exchange, and recommendations for future works that lead to an autonomy that does not come easily.

An unsuspecting reader or listener might perceive an “injustice” in the preference for non-cisgender identities, especially when such voices critique other actions, labeling them as “false, archaic, absurd, irrational, artificial, or illusory” (Latour, 2012, p. 89). These statements, however, speak to the macrosocial order, where certain bodies are rendered undesirable, symbolizing an effort to create markers that resist disqualification, shame, fear, and reduction. The aim is to forge a new materiality for subjectivities that occupy the position of being-an-Other, to reformulate subjection itself (Butler, 1997).

The creative sensitivity inherent in this process detaches the body from the automatic replication of hegemonic worldviews. Through sometimes obligatory, sometimes voluntary, and sometimes deliberate fusion, these narratives interlace stories about the (own) body, establishing spaces that fully embrace its creative potential.

Paul B. Preciado (2018, p. 414) observes that political subjectivity emerges when an individual ceases to identify with established representations, as in an experiment that rejects prevailing ideas of representation promising happiness and fulfillment. Subjectivity, he argues, is produced precisely through experimentation with new self-representation techniques, which are fundamentally political (Habib, 2021, p. 43). It is in this process that the possibility of transforming reality begins to take shape.

In pursuing political subjectivities, one must cross the line between individual personality and the inevitable lack of control over how these representations are received:

*I know there are many things I fail to tell. And that is why when I add something, I want*





*to make sure that I managed to make that drawing very large, so that people can read between the lines. But, yes, there are many things that I end up not sharing. I don't think that all art needs to be shared [...] for me, art has more of a sense of life, a very personal tone. And what goes beyond this is more like a political duty (4).*

In short, by sharing these internal and personal creations with the outside world, a network of production is woven to expand what was primarily and exclusively private. This dynamic links the search for internal recognition to the formation of alliances with others, embracing the presence of the “Other” and its otherness. It establishes a connection with the world, enabling the pursuit of what is held in common through these acts of multiplicity:

*[I try to reach] other people who may be feeling similar things [...], to offer them this space of acceptance. And I think this is very political because other people with similar experiences – experiences that overlap in some way regardless of the spectrum of the LGBT acronym – end up feeling more welcomed and more supported (1).*

*[My creation] is not just any ideological propaganda, right? It is propaganda that absolutely speaks to my own ethical suffering. So making propaganda and putting it out there, especially the place in the world of a transmasculine person, a place that is very silenced, very invisible, gives me confidence; it gives me comfort, it also gives me a support network. I was able to meet many people there, and that is very satisfying (4).*

The same internal and emotional impulse also underlies the immersive political motivation behind creative works. It serves as a force through which individuals find allies and facilitates collective idea exchanges – where contrasts can invade and reshape each other. This perceptual experience of creation brings a common sentiment to the interviewees: a discomfort stemming from individual daily life that, through artistic creation, can overflow, take shape, and find context in a shared space.

The transformative power of chaos and anguish – emerging from a confrontation with suffering and culminating in an aesthetic reorganization of feelings – serves as a counterpoint to ordinary life (Braga, 2021). This dynamic imbues such creations potent forms of art. Their significance lies in the uniqueness of their processes, which often do not seek to overtly disrupt the world, but instead reveal a nuanced and deeply personal artistry rooted in subtle transformation.

Finally, “the constitution of modes of existence or lifestyles is not only aesthetic; it is what Foucault calls ethics, as opposed to morality” (Deleuze, 2013, p. 129). The creative act that gives rise to an artistic style reflects a depersonalized lifestyle that envisions new possibilities for life and ways of being, opposing coercive moral rules. These norms often impose a misleading essential value on individuals, suggesting a transcendence beyond the physical body (Deleuze, 2017; 2013). Thus, *the constitution of these lifestyles or modes of existence is not solely aesthetic*; they are completed by an ethical dimension that examines the statements, emotions, perspectives,



and visualities that accompany us, inviting a way of life that resists prescriptive moral constraints.

## 5 Final considerations

Between the representation of hegemonic territories in the construction of the world and the emergence of political subjectivity, aesthetics, visibility, and the production of imagery inevitably play a role. In the intersection of materializations, identification, and body politics, statements collected on trans\* artistic creation emerges as a powerful counterpoint to the clinical gaze of medical literature, establishing what Silva-Cañaveral (2019) defines as a “field of visibility and experimentation for understanding marginalized subjects and the construction of meaning.”

In this sense, the creative act is understood as a process that reshapes personal and private dimensions, disrupting the imposed tradition of silence for these subjects. A trans\* body’s artistic expression need not focus exclusively on “identity” to affirm its value; rather, its difference lies beyond the boundaries of any singular category.

By reconfiguring perceptions of fixed identities, creative expression reveals similarities that foster a network of belonging. Through art, the formation of personal memories through art enables strategic, autonomous recognition amid historical constructs legitimized by normative understandings of “identity” or “category.” This re-narration functions as a tool for resistance, preserving expressions that can be articulated both within oneself and between similar subjects, affirming their place in the world.

Thus, a creative approach grounded in disruption and willing to embrace ambiguity (Louro, 2004) requires an effort to transform societal negativity into political-existential expression and self-determined protagonism. This reconfiguration moves beyond the essentializing conditions often imposed by reductive categories. It does not attempt to define “who they are” or reduce an “identity” to a fixed narrative. Instead, the construction of perspectives from within – through the lived experiences of those inhabiting them – reveals what can be built collectively in contact with shared imaginaries. Rather than disputing an essentialized identity, this process invites positions based on an evolving, procedural conception of selfhood, a notion that, as Hall (1996, p.68) argues, is never fully complete nor entirely lost.

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