

Beyond the Incongruence of Gender Identity

Expanding the Political-Theoretical Imaginary of Trans Studies

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Where Is Trans Studies Taking Us?

It is mid-October 2022 in Berlin and I find myself at a meeting organized by one of the biggest trans organizations of the country, the Bundesverband Trans (BVT). The topic for the afternoon is “Trans Studies in Germany – where are we and where do we want to go?” (Bundesverband Trans 2022). Considering the institutional non-existence of Trans Studies in the German context¹, I look around, wondering what personal trajectories, texts discussions and activist encounters have shaped our understanding of this field of study and brought us here today. The event and the attendance speak to the relevance of Trans Studies. But the group discussions and informal conversations show another side: the experiences with teaching, researching or writing leave some of us politically frustrated. It seems as if Trans Studies, a space we seek to occupy for thinking and acting towards transformation, has its own agency, one that limits the kinds of questions we can ask, the demographics of the people who feel interpellated, and the analysis we are able to formulate. This agency is one that limits, in the end, the possibilities we can mobilize for change and the futures to which we can contribute.

This discontent is not unique to the German context. Andrea Long Chu is a trans writer and critic based in New York who voiced her anger in one of the most-read articles from “Transgender Studies Quarterly” in 2019: “Let’s face it: Trans Studies is over. If it isn’t, it should be” (Chu/Drager 2019, 103). In this article I engage with the critical dialogue between Chu and Harsin Drager, and identify moments of agreement and disagreement in order to formulate my own discontent with the field, but also to articulate ways in which Trans Studies can better hold and nourish the kind of political and epistemic projects that I am interested in. Trans Studies should be over, says Chu, constructing Trans Studies as an external and irreparable entity. There is truth in the view that we don’t decide on voluntary terms “where do we want to go with Trans Studies?”, as the BVT asked. Trans Studies is already taking us places. But, by the same logic, we can’t create an alternative space unaffected by the wider social dynamics that make Trans Studies so frustrating. Chu and Drager propose to embrace “trans satire” and to write without “*political optimism*”, giving in to “the bitter disappointment of finding out the world is too small for all our desires, and especially the political ones” (ibid., 105-106). I refuse this on the grounds that there is too much at stake to use the academic space as a platform for voicing despair. Considering the intensification of the global economic, ecological and political crisis and