



FORUM

University of Edinburgh
Postgraduate Journal of Culture and the Arts
Issue 34 | 2023

Title	Trans as Description and Method: A Reflection in Conversation with Prerana Kumar's "Notes on Ritual as Haunting//Ritual as Healing"
Author	Claudia Sterbini
Publication	FORUM: University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture & the Arts
Issue Number	34
Publication Date	October 2023

FORUM claims non-exclusive rights to reproduce this article electronically (in full or in part) and to publish this work in any such media current or later developed. The author retains all rights, including the right to be identified as the author wherever and whenever this article is published, and the right to use all or part of the article and abstracts, with or without revision or modification in compilations or other publications. Any latter publication shall recognise FORUM as the original publisher.

Trans as Description and Method

A Reflection in Conversation with Prerana Kumar’s “Notes on Ritual as Haunting//Ritual as Healing”

Claudia Sterbini

Deputy Editor – University of Edinburgh

This issue opens with a creative writing piece, not an introduction, in the pure spirit of ‘trans-’. Through Prerana Kumar’s “Notes on Ritual as Haunting//Ritual as Healing”, we question what ‘trans-’ means in creative practice and see it at work in the author’s questioning of their own constructed self. In this visceral, compelling text, Kumar reveals how their identity itself breaks boundaries, challenging the supposed separation between genders, nations, languages, past and present.

Kumar asks: “Whose borders/body did I come from?” Like this author, our issue similarly questions our past and our ‘borders’. In the text, this allows Kumar to explore the effects of distance, memory, and gender on their own body, and the ways in which the latter unsettles upheld norms. In our issue, this grants us an opportunity to perturb epistemological categories, questioning the ‘borders/body’ of our academic knowledge.

We want to remind the readers that trans-, as a concept and prefix, is powerful: attaching itself to concepts, it challenges supposedly settled knowledge about the world we live in. In FORUM’s 34th issue, this destabilisation becomes central. We draw attention to the importance the prefix ‘trans-’ has acquired in recent decades as an index of movement, crossing, and shifting – and we understand it as both description and method, offering new perspectives on all matters transnational, transcultural, translation, transdisciplinary, transgender...

Why in this space, and why now? In “Fighting Transphobia in UCU Edinburgh”, Grant Buttars provides an overview of the vicious transphobic attacks within the UCU at the University of Edinburgh. In his recounting of the traumatic and disorienting rise of transphobia within the Edinburgh community, he reminds us that “liberation cannot be exclusionary and trade unions must take a clear position on this as more and more are doing” (27). With this issue, FORUM wants to stand with activists like Grant Buttars and to contrast the transphobia that, since 2018, has continued to sporadically resurface within the University of Edinburgh. Our journal gives space for academic discussions on gender and sexuality, and a platform for brilliant trans and nonbinary artists like Prerana Kumar.

In “Introduction: Trans Struggle is Class Struggle”, Charlotte Powell maintains that gendered liberation is “not just about the right for individuals to change from one gendered position to another [...]. It’s about smashing the structures, both physical and ideological, that dominate all people, cis and trans.” (9) In this spirit, this issue’s ten contributions offer new perspectives on trans, questioning the supposed binary and boundary of gender, national confines, disciplines, and media. This act of dismantling confines constructs new epistemic trajectories and new freeing ways of looking at the humanities. Like Kumar, we “want to chart a (re)connection”, or rather, we want to discover missing connections and blur supposed separations between categories.

We chose to open with Kumar’s text as we think it encompasses the themes that we present in our issue and that our authors have chosen to tackle. Their focus on their body as the place where gender is reasserted and simultaneously transgressed is reflected in our first section, *Transgressive Bodies*. Casey Ann McKinney’s article focuses on genderqueer writer/director Ester Martin Bergsmark’s film *Something Must Break*, considering the film’s use of trash and polluted environments as a metaphor for transness’ liminal status. This is followed by Kai Tjoon Lim’s article on ‘queering sight’, in which the author explores the ways in which Josh Malerman’s *Bird Box* uses sight to question restrictive binarisms within identity formation. We then move more closely into a discussion of female transgressive bodies, with Mariama Diallo’s article exploring the ways in which decadent artists and writers used the figure of the *femme fatale* Salomé to subvert traditional gender and power dynamics. Finally, Jessica Lombard brings the section to a close with a theoretical and philosophical consideration of the ways in which contemporary transhumanist movements attempt to transcend human structures such as death and illness, paving the way for new understandings of the human experience.

Kumar’s text also questions boundaries between different cultures, with their writing thinking deeply about how identity hinges on language and national inheritance. Similarly, our section, *Transfiction and Translation*, wants to offer new ways of understanding how texts are mediated across different individuals, cultures, and languages. Debayudh Chatterjee sets us off with a paper on J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, exploring how this text reproduces and reflects on the writing of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Heinrich von Kleist. Secondly, Adam B. Neikirk examines the ways in which the writing of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Hartley Coleridge can be considered transfictional, in that they straddle the line between fact and fiction. Finally, Daisy Isabelle Tower’s article examines translation more closely, discussing

the transformative and disruptive process of translating Mercè Rodoreda's novel *La Mort I la Primavera* into English.

Returning to Kumar's text, it is essential to notice how their writing puts the blurring of literary genres into practice, mixing poetry with prose to construct a multifaced art piece that refuses to be constricted to a single category. We discuss this method of blurring genres in our last section, Transmediality and Art, where we consider the ways in which the humanities insistently refuse the supposed boundaries and confines of artistic categories. Audrey Chan focuses on Alberto Breccia, exploring how this artist blends Futurist paintings and the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe in the form of comics and graphic novels that resist Argentinian fascism. Hanna Agnieszka Liskowska translates Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* into the terms of surrealist art, demonstrating how this author crosses the boundaries between literature and painting in her writing. Finally, we close this issue with M. Bryn Brody's analysis of Rebecca Belmore's *Fringe* as a response to transhistoric violence against Indigenous women and girls.

These pieces talk to each other and our theme, initiating a conversation on the pluralistic and nuanced forms that 'trans-' can take. This issue hopes to be part of a broader discussion questioning binaries and boundaries and revealing the true potential of 'trans-' as a method. We reflect on what a real trans(disciplinary) future can mean for academia and hope to put it into practice in our own careers and pursuits. In the meantime, we stand in solidarity with trans people as we offer a little insight into what an anti-binarian approach to humanities criticism could mean.

Works Cited

- Buttars, Grant. "Fighting Transphobia in UCU Edinburgh." *Fighting Transphobia: A Practical and Theoretical Guide*, edited by Una O'Sullivan. Habro Printing Ltd, 2023, pp.24-27.
- Powell, Charlotte. "Introduction: Trans Struggle is Class Struggle". *Fighting Transphobia: A Practical and Theoretical Guide*, edited by Una O'Sullivan. Habro Printing Ltd, 2023, pp.5-10.