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Concepts as Assemblages: Methodological Proposal for Critical Discourse Research on Gender Identity

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Abstract | This paper upholds the importance of treating concepts as situated interdisciplinary arrangements or *assemblages*. This proposal is based on my research on the discursive representation of transgender identities in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I start by giving some context on gender identity as a research topic, and make the case for studying it from a discursive perspective. I then present the methodology, theoretical framework, and main results of my research. From it, gender identity emerges as an interdisciplinary concept that combines elements from Critical Discourse Analysis, Transgender theory, and Deleuzian philosophy. Finally, I use the connections between them to propose a methodological approach based on the concept of *assemblage*, as a view that can enrich both Discourse Studies in particular and critical social science in general.

Keywords | Gender Identity, Transgender theory, Argentina, Discursive Representations, Interdisciplinarity, Assemblage, Critical Social Science, Deleuze

Introduction

This paper upholds the importance of treating concepts from a perspective that prevents taking them as totalised objects of study. Such a view, of course, has already been widely discussed in the social sciences and humanities.[1] The specific contribution I propose here is that the concepts we use to analyse social phenomena should be treated as open, mobile, and situated interdisciplinary arrangements or *assemblages*. This idea evolved from my research on the discursive representation of transgender identities in Buenos Aires, Argentina.[2] More precisely, it stemmed from subsequent reflection on the methodological choices I made during the research and writing process. The paper is structured as follows. The first two sections provide context on gender identity as a socially relevant research topic and make the case for studying it from a discursive perspective. The third section presents the background, theoretical framework, methodology, and main results of my doctoral research, upon which the specific proposal

[1]An early example can be found in Ferdinand de Saussure's assertion that "far from it being the object that antedates the viewpoint, it would seem that it is the viewpoint that creates the object," where he defies a naïve realist position (See, de Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Philosophical Library, 1959, p. 7). Different authors have gone deeper in this direction by claiming that concepts and analytical categories are not fixed entities with universal meanings, but emerge from contingent historical, political, and discursive relations. Some examples of this anti-essentialist view can be found in Michel Foucault's treatment of concepts as the unstable products of discursive formations that respond to historical relations of power and knowledge (See, Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*. Pantheon Books, 1972; *The History of Sexuality*); in Pierre Bourdieu's relational social epistemology, which aims to overcome the dichotomy of objectivism and subjectivism (See, Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice.* Polity Press, 1990); in Stuart Hall's view of identity as "not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional [concept]" (3); in Judith Butler's conception that gender categories do not correspond with or emanate from an internal essence, but are continually (re)constituted by performative acts (*Gender Trouble*); and in Donna Haraway's statement that objectivity is the product, not of an all-encompassing and disembodied point of view, but of embodied and thus necessarily situated perspectives (See, Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Routledge, 1991, pp. 183–201). In their review of the major paradigms that inform qualitative social research, Yvonna Lincoln, Susan Lynham and Egon Guba make an illustrative general remark in this sense when they say that, in view of the recent "explosion" of methodologies and materials, "inquiry methodology can no longer be treated as a set of universally applicable rules or abstractions" (Lincoln, Yvonna S., et al. "Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences, Revisited." *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, Sage, 2012, pp. 213–214).

[2]This research was conducted during my PhD formation and led to the writing of my doctoral thesis: Soich, Matías. *Los devenires y la identidad de género: hacia un análisis lingüístico-crítico y conceptual de la construcción de representaciones discursivas sobre la propia identidad de género en personas trans de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (2013-2015)* (*Becomings and gender identity: Towards a linguistic-critical and conceptual analysis of the construction of discursive representations about gender identity among trans people in the city of Buenos Aires [2013-2015]*). 2017. University of Buenos Aires, PhD Dissertation, directed by María Laura Pardo and co-directed by Mónica Cragnolini.

of this article (concepts as assemblages) is based. The fourth section shows how gender identity emerges from this research as a concept that involves interdisciplinary connections from three fields: Critical Discourse Analysis, Transgender theory, and Deleuzian philosophy, and it can be viewed through the image of a "gem" with different facets. Finally, the last two sections propose the philosophical concept of *assemblage* as a more refined image than that of the gem for treating such interdisciplinary connections. I believe assemblages provide both open mobility and synthetic power, which reinforce the epistemological and emancipatory goals of Discourse Studies in particular and of critical social science in general.

The Social Relevance of (Trans)gender Identity

To gain perspective on gender identity as a socially relevant research theme, it is important to consider the historical process that began with the pathologization and criminalization of dissident gender identities and expressions, and lead to our present of social exclusion, collective organized resistance, and fight for equality. Throughout history and geography, there have always been people whose gender identities diverged from what was socially sanctioned, but here we will begin in Western Europe in the 19th century. It is there and then that some of the gender identity-related categories still prevalent in the Western world were created by a scientific community of cisgender[3] male doctors, psychologists, and psychiatrists: "Sexology was born under the sign of pathology" (Di Segni 11).[4] Reproductive, monogamous heterosexuality—and the oppositional sexual dualism behind it—was at the core of this new science's criteria for establishing what was to be considered normal or abnormal (Preciado). This normative classification involved elaborate discursive activity that produced sex both as the privileged site of truth and as an object of public interest, scrutiny, and administration (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 24, 56). Through the normalization of bodies and desires, sexology enabled a repressive social function that fell on those classified as abnormal, while at the same time—according to the Foucauldian concept of power—it produced and dispersed various elements that entered into the formation of identities and sexual subjectivities.[5]

[3]The term *cisgender* began to be used by the transgender community in the USA in the 1990s and since then has gradually expanded worldwide, especially through the work of Julia Serano. Broadly speaking, it refers to those who identify with the gender they were socially assigned at birth, that is, people who are not transgender. Since it claims for a minority the up-to-then denied right to name the majority, it constitutes both an epistemological and political category. See, Serano, Julia. *Outspoken. A Decade of Transgender Activism and Trans Feminism*. Switch Hitter, 2016.

[4]The original quote reads "la sexología nació bajo el signo de la patología." All quotes from Spanish works were translated by the author.

[5]An example provided by Foucault is secondary schools in the 18th century, where such diverse elements as architecture (space for classes, dormitories distribution, furniture design), internal organization (rules of discipline and conduct), and discursive elements that constituted "a whole literature of precepts, opinions, observations, medical advice, clinical cases, outlines for reform, and plans for ideal institutions" (*History of Sexuality* 28) converged around the children as a power machine that intended, not to suppress or silence juvenile sexuality, but to "give it an analytical, visible, and permanent reality: it was implanted in bodies, slipped in beneath modes of conduct, made into a principle of classification and intelligibility" (44). The scientific and social constitution of multiple "sexual specimens"—the homosexual, the zoophile, the hermaphrodite, etc.—is another example of this type of power as it "did not exclude sexuality, but included it in the body as a mode of specification of individuals" (47).

In this line, some of the medical works that influenced the development of the notion of *gender identity* include Kaan's *Psychopathia sexualis* (1844), which defined *sexual instinct* as an innate and dually polarized (masculine/feminine) force, and Krafft-Ebing's identically-titled *Psychopathia sexualis* (1886), which decreed that *normal* sexual instinct was heterosexual, and that all "non-natural" satisfactions of said instinct, including homosexuality and "inversions," were to be considered perversions. Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (first volume published in 1897) associated homosexuality with the presence of physical and psychological traits of the "opposite sex," while speaking of "congenital sexual inversion" (1). In *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress* (1910), Hirschfeld considered transvestism as a natural phenomenon of somatic origin, arriving at some progressive conclusions for his time, but still supporting moralist prescriptions based on the theory of degeneration.[6] This scenario stretched well into the second half of the 20th century, when advances in sex reassignment surgeries were accompanied by new medical concepts like *transsexuality*, usually with strong pathological and demeaning connotations.[7] These passed on into worldwide influential documents, such as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* and the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems*.

In Western Europe, some of these medical classifications aimed at moving unconventional identities and sexualities away from the influence of judicial power, which categorized them as criminal lifestyles. Turning crimes into diseases, however, did not greatly improve people's social status. By the end of the 19th century, an opposite movement was taking place in Latin America, more specifically in Argentina. There, medical criminologists typified the "sexual inverted" as particular types *within* the criminal class (Fernández; Wayar). In these southern latitudes, pathologizing homosexuals, transvestites, and other sexual non-conforming individuals was not an alternative to criminalizing them, but its complement (Ben). With varying degrees of intensity, the criminalization of transgender identities in Latin America persisted during the 20th century. In Argentina, it was typically implemented by the police through local "codes of conduct" that allowed them to discretionally persecute and punish identities and activities—such as homosexuality, transvestism, and prostitution—that were considered "minor crimes" disruptive of the social order (Insausti).

The social dispute around police codes and the use of public space in the 1990s framed the emergence of the first transvestite and transsexual organizations in the city of Buenos Aires (Berkins, "Un itinerario político del travestismo";[8] Soich, "Back to Where they Were"). Initially founded to protest against police harassment, these social

[6]The theory of degeneration, published by psychiatrist Benedict Morel halfway through the 19th century, states that the consequences of "deviant" conducts could be inherited from one's predecessors. In this theory, degeneration encompasses both physical and moral conditions, and its counterpart, normality, is described as a bourgeois quality directed by strict religious values (Di Segni 48–49).

[7]One of the modern founders of this concept, David Cauldwell, claimed for example that "when an individual who is unfavourably affected psychologically determines to live and appear as a member of the sex to which he or she does not belong, such an individual is what may be called a psychopathic transexual. This means, simply, that one is mentally unhealthy and because of this the person desires to live as a member of the opposite sex." See, Cauldwell, David. "Psychopathia Transexualis." *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, Routledge, 2006, pp. 40–44.

[8]The title translates to "*A political itinerary of transvestism*."

organizations gradually expanded their scope to denounce the general exclusion of transgender people imposed by the State and society, and to demand both formal and material equality. In the 2000s, the first statistical analyses of transvestites and transsexuals' life conditions in Argentina, conducted by an alliance of activists and scholars (Berkins and Fernández; Berkins, *Cumbia*),[9] were published. These studies revealed that factors like early expulsion from the family home and the formal education system, lack of access to both formal and informal employment, discrimination in the health system, and homelessness, among others, formed the links of a continuous chain of social exclusion. As a result, transvestites, transsexuals, and transgender women still have, today, the lowest life expectancy among the Argentinean population: around 35 years, less than half the expectancy of a cisgender person (MPD and BPTMC 157).[10]

Since then, Argentinean transgender movements have multiplied and exponentially boosted their political and theoretical power, becoming an increasingly visible social agent that denounces structural inequality from an intersectional perspective. By reframing gender identity within the human rights paradigm (Litardo), they have achieved many fundamental milestones, at both the State/governmental and civil society levels. These milestones include the creation of transgender worker cooperatives, the passing of Same-sex Marriage in 2010, the opening of Mocha Celis (the first secondary school with an inclusive sexual diversity perspective) in 2011, the passing of the National Gender Identity Law in 2012, and the National Transgender Work Quota and the non-binary Identity Documents in 2021. These were accompanied by an increasing visibilization of transgender productions and topics in the media, the arts, and popular culture. Despite these advances, however, the general life conditions of transgender people in Argentina remain well below average, with dramatic debts regarding basic human rights, social and institutional violence, pathologizing views in the medical system, police criminalization, and hate crimes. This situation was aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Soich and Mireles) and by the recent political advance of the neoliberal far-right movement (de Belaunde; Pasik; Lorca).

This brief sketch of the history of transgender identities, from medical classifications in 19th century Europe to the emergence of human rights movements in 20th century Argentina, poses a question of life-or-death consequences: how do we as a society understand gender identity, and how do we act on the basis of this understanding? Attending to this question, in the next section I address the importance of approaching gender identity from a discursive perspective.

Gender Identity and Discourse

As Stuart Hall has argued, by the end of the 20th century different disciplines considered the concept of *identity* as an open and multiple process of identification constructed through difference, instead of a self-sufficient or immutable essence; as a concept that is inevitably inconclusive and, yet, irreducibly necessary for social and political agency;

[9]The full title translates to "*Cumbia, drinking and tears. National report on the situation of transvestites, transsexuals and transgender*."

[10]This number is mainly based on trans-feminine identities. There are no precise statistics on the life expectancy of trans men and non-binary persons in Argentina, who face equally dire conditions, discrimination, and violence.

and finally, as a construction that takes place through *discourse*, conceived in turn as a moment within a complex set of social practices. In this sense, the concept of *identity* experienced a veritable "discursive explosion," according to which identities are "produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power" (Hall 4).

These features make identity an extremely interesting concept for Discourse Studies, particularly for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA focuses on the dialectic and mutual production of social meanings and power relations, especially by targeting discourses that constitute and are constituted by inequality and power abuse (Fairclough; van Dijk). To this end, CDA researchers use linguistic analysis to relate the formal components of concrete texts with more abstract notions such as *discourse*, which in turn help them understand those texts as part of a social practice. By "social practice" I mean "habitualised ways, tied to particular times and places, in which people apply resources (material or symbolic) to act together in the world" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 21). And I understand "discourse" as a moment of social practice that involves different semiotic processes such as talking, writing, gesturing, and producing images. This relation is of course complex, as discourse informs social practice in varying combinations and degrees (compare the role of semiotic processes in different social practices, such as writing an application, resisting eviction, and playing football).

From a feminist historiographical perspective, Joan Scott highlights discourse as a vital constituent of subjective identity and experience: "Subjects are constituted discursively, experience is a linguistic event (it doesn't happen outside established meanings). […] Since discourse is by definition shared, experience is collective as well as individual. […] The question then becomes *how to analyse language*" ("Experience" 34; emphasis added). By creating an operative frame for studying (gender) identities as practices that are socially situated, constructed, and negotiated through language—instead of stabilized products (Ainsworth and Hardy)—CDA represents then a possible answer to Scott's question. In the same spirit, in one of CDA's founding texts, Fairclough poses the production of social identities and subjective positions as one of the three main social functions of discourse (64). This was taken up by the Latin American critical appropriation of CDA, whose researchers have explored the discursive production of (usually demeaned and oppressed) social identities.[11] Latin American CDA researchers emphasize social relations, practices, and power dynamics as fundamental aspects of identity: "To understand any identitarian process, it is necessary to know its social and political context, that is, what we term its social practice" (Pardo, "La identidad personal

[11]See, for example, Pardo, "La identidad personal y social" (the full title translates to "Personal and social identity of indigent people in their discourse. A critical analysis of neoliberal discourse in Argentina and its consequences"); Montecino, Lésmer, (editor). *Discurso, pobreza y exclusión en América Latina* (*Discourse, poverty and exclusion in Latin America*). Cuarto Propio, 2010; Aires Gomes, Maria Carmen. "Identidades de gênero no movimento funk: um estudo explanatório crítico de notícias jornalísticas brasileiras (Gender identities in the funk movement: an explanatory critical study of Brazilian journal news)." *Ilha do Desterro*, vol. 69, no. 1, 2016, pp. 183–199; Zoppi Fontana, Mónica, and Josefina Ferrari (orgs.). *Mulheres em discurso: identificações de gênero e práticas de resistência* (*Women in discourse: gender identifications and resistance practices*). Pontes, 2017; and Soich, "Back to Where they Were."

y social" 133).[12] As we will address later, although Latin American CDA researchers share the general principle of European CDA—the commitment to social change through a change in discourses—they focus on local identities and concerns, with a "decolonizing stamp that pursues the creation of its own theories and methods, as well as a bibliography that is pertinent to our problems and entails deep social action" (Pardo and Soich 80).

The concept of discourse as a moment of social practice features prominently in many academic definitions of gender and gender identity. For example, Scott defines gender as the social organization of sexual difference: the knowledge that "establishes meanings for bodily differences," and is therefore inseparable from "a broad range of discursive contexts" (*Gender and the Politics of History* 2). An unavoidable reference for the gender-discourse connection is Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble*; *Bodies that Matter*), who theorizes gender as the unstable product of a series of performative practices, constantly re-actualized through (among other things) discourse. From her perspective, gender is not something that people "are," "have," or even "express," but the socially constructed "effect of truth" of a series of discursive practices that stabilize, normalize, and (sometimes) subvert identity within a cultural binary matrix. This matrix operates in all our social dealings. It conditions personal and institutional expectations about other people's genders, how they are "read," talked about and, consequentially, treated.

The functions of gender in its Butlerian definition as intelligibility matrix—that is, producing social identities and subjective positions—overlap with the socially constitutive functions that Fairclough attributes to discourse as social practice. We can consider gender and discourse, then, as two series of interactional practices that converge in the constitution of social identities within specific power relations. This marks the compatibility of the Butlerian notion of gender with CDA, opening up significant possibilities for situated, discursive, and text-oriented analyses of gender identity (de Gregorio Godeo). As an example of this, in the next section I present my research on the discursive representation of transgender identities in autobiographical discourses.

The Representation of Transgender Identities: A Discursive Study

In this section, I present the theoretical background, framework, methodology, and main results of the doctoral research upon which the methodological proposal of this paper is based. Concerning the background, a quick Internet search on the subject will show a vast body of work about the discursive construction of different aspects of identity, such as social class, ethnicity, political ideology, and, of course, gender. However, regarding *transgender* identity, results are far more restricted (Martínez-Guzmán and Íñiguez-Rueda). A systematic search in the main international Discourse Analysis and CDA periodicals (*Discourse & Society*, *Discurso y Sociedad*, *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios del Discurso*, *Cadernos de Linguagem e Sociedade*, *Critical Discourse Studies*, *Signo y Seña*, *Forma y Función*, and *Onomázein*) shows relatively few papers featuring linguistic analysis on transgender identities. Results only increase if other academic genres (like thesis and dissertations) and other disciplines that claim to resort to

[12]The original quote reads "para entender cualquier proceso identitario es necesario conocer su contexto social y político, o bien, lo que denominamos su práctica social."

discursive analysis (like psychology, sociology, and communication sciences) are included in the search criteria. These works deal mainly with the self-representation of transgender identities, their treatment in the media, and their relation with the medical system. The analysed corpus typically consists of autobiographical discourses, interviews, and written news pieces. Despite acknowledging the fundamental role of discourse in the construction of gender identity, most of these works on transgender identity favour a purely theoretical approach to that role over detailed textual analysis of the corpus. There is little or no explanation about how the text is methodologically treated, and, when textual analysis of the corpus does occur, it is usually restricted to content paraphrasing. This means that some parts of the corpus (for example, quotes from the answers in an interview) are reproduced and then commented upon in order to illustrate the author's theoretical insights on gender identity, with no examination of how linguistic forms and structures convey and shape meaning.[13]

For my doctoral research, my take on these issues was guided by the following question: is it possible to formulate, with the theoretical and methodological tools of CDA and the contributions of Deleuzian philosophy, a socially relevant interpretation of how transgender persons discursively represent their own gender identities? As can be seen and will be elaborated later, the question itself adopted an interdisciplinary form. To tackle this question, I collected a corpus of 18 oral life stories (in the sense defined by Charlotte Linde)[14] and 27 autobiographical written pieces published in print and digital media. Both the oral and the written pieces were produced by transgender individuals (transvestites, transsexuals, trans women and men, and non-binary persons), ranging from 19 to 83 years old. The corpus was produced in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina,

[13]Some examples of works that favour theoretical approaches over text analysis in the sense described above are: Zambrini, Laura. "De metonimias y metáforas sobre géneros y corporalidades travestis en la prensa digital local (Of metonyms and metaphors about transvestite genders and bodies in the local digital press)." *Avatares de la comunicación y la cultura*, no. 5, 2013, pp. 1–16; Bosco, Cristian, et al. "Personas transexuales y discursos acerca de lo trans: desafíos a la clínica psicológica (Transsexual people and discourses about the transgender: challenges to clinical psychology)." *Revista GPU*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2014, pp. 458–467; González, John Gama. *Ni delincuentes ni putas ni peluqueras. Estereotipo de mujeres trans construido por la prensa en contraste con historias de vida dentro de la vivencia en diversidad de género* (*Neither criminals nor whores nor hairdressers. The stereotype of trans women as constructed by the press in contrast to life stories within the experience of gender diversity*). 2015. Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, MA Dissertation; Coll-Planas, Gerard and Miquel Missé. "La identidad en disputa. Conflictos alrededor de la construcción de la transexualidad (Identity in dispute: conflicts surrounding the construction of transsexuality)." *Papers. Revista de Sociología*, vol. 100, no. 1, 2015, pp. 35–52; and de la Ossa, Abigaël Candelas. "'Talk, listen, think': Discourses of agency and unintentional violence in consent guidance for gay, bisexual and trans men." *Discourse & Society*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2016, pp. 365–382. For more examples see, Soich, "Los devenires" 93–109. It should be noted that my observation about the discrepancy between the discursive orientation stated in these works and their limited implementation of textual analysis does not imply a value judgment on their originality or contributions. On the contrary, many of them offer socially important theoretical reflections.

[14]From a linguistic perspective, Linde defines a life story as an oral unit of social interaction. This unit is temporally discontinuous, as it is made up of the various narratives a person tells about themselves throughout their life. In this sense, a life story can only be ideally totalized; for specific work, researchers must use fragmentary narratives. In addition to being temporally discontinuous, a life story is necessarily open, both structurally and interpretively, as it changes over time according to the circumstances of the narrator and the receivers. Life stories perform various functions, including expressing our sense of self, giving sense to our relationships and activities and claiming or negotiating our membership in social groups. See, Linde, Charlotte. *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence*. Oxford UP, 1993.

between 2011 and 2016. All life stories were recorded, transcribed, and segmented in analytical units by me.

While collecting the corpus, I gradually became acquainted and involved with different LGBTIQ+ activists,[15] a process that led me to become a member of the LGBTIQ+ civil association, Mocha Celis. Being a part of Mocha Celis allowed me to interact directly with voices and experiences that modified my theoretical and political views and enriched them with different stances on gender, identity, knowledge production, and social inequality. My experience as a researcher was thus welded with my experience as an activist for LGBTIQ+ rights, which in turn reaffirmed my conviction that critical social theory can and should be made from a situated and involved experience, with an eye set on its possible applications for social change.

The theoretical framework for this research was threefold. CDA provided the main component, as it permitted working on a pressing social issue—the configuration of gender identities that are excluded and abused by society and the State—from a discursive perspective, resorting to text-oriented analysis to study the dialectical relations between discourse, power, and society. While this general take comes from CDA's European sources (Fairclough; van Dijk), my research belongs in the current expressed by the Latin American Network of Discourse Studies on Extreme Poverty (REDLAD).[16] Its members particularly favour some ethical aspects of CDA, such as the researchers' acknowledgment of their political-ideological stance, the interest in fieldwork, and the social application of results (Pardo and Soich). This motivated some important methodological decisions, such as creating an interdisciplinary frame, arranging a corpus that respected the emerging political and ethical standards on gender identity, and adopting inductive and qualitative methodology and methods.[17]

Two fundamental CDA concepts are *discourse as social practice* (Fairclough), which I have addressed in the previous section, and *discursive representations*. The latter

[15]LGBTIQ+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersexual, and Queer. The sign "+" indicates that the list remains open.

[16]The REDLAD was created in 2005 with three main goals: 1) organizing an interdisciplinary team of CDA researchers that conjointly contribute to the study of cultural, personal, and social identity from discourses, 2) creating knowledge of the theoretical and methodological processes for Discourse Analysis and elucidating Latin American social phenomena, and 3) consolidating academic participation and dialogue between researchers from different countries and fields with an interest in Discourse Analysis. See, Montecino, Lésmer. "Red Latinoamericana de Estudios del Discurso de la Pobreza Extrema (REDLAD): hablar desde los pobres [Latin American Network of Discourse Studies on Extreme Poverty (REDLAD): speaking from the poor]." *Pasado, presente y futuro de los Estudios del Discurso en América Latina* (*Past, present and future of Discourse Studies in Latin America*), edited by Denize E. Garcia da Silva and María Laura Pardo, Universidade de Brasília, 2015, pp. 82–103.

[17]Regarding qualitative methodology, Julie Nagoshi, Craig Nagoshi and Stephan/ie Brzuzy comparatively revise their own quantitative and qualitative studies on sexual identity in cisgender and transgender individuals, and conclude that only qualitative approaches allow considering each person's particular vision of gender, while at the same time appreciating the differences between those visions. For these authors, qualitative methods are unique for dealing with the complex process of challenging and re-building traditional, binary gender roles, as well as for affirming the importance of bodily experience. Since gender identity is situated in an intersection of individual and social experiences and practices, they also advocate for its multidisciplinary study. See, Nagoshi, Julie L., et al. *Gender and Sexual Identity: Transcending Feminist and Queer Theory*. Springer, 2014.

can be defined as those parts of social representations that are mainly (re)produced through discourse (Pardo, *Teoría y metodología* 65).[18] One of CDA's specific tasks is the linguistic study of discursive representations. In a more technical sense, a discursive representation is defined as a generic concept that emerges from an ensemble of discursive categories. Some of these categories are always present in any text, such as those that enable the text's leading "voice," those that convey actions, and those that convey temporal or spatial meanings. Other categories are only present in some texts, because they convey meanings related to that text's particular context and topics. All these categories are inductively reconstructed by the researcher through careful textual analysis, which involves classifying different linguistic elements, establishing their mutual relations, and interpreting how these relations produce specific discursive representations.[19] In this research, the main discursive representation under study is that of *gender identity*.

The second part of the theoretical frame was built upon feminist, gender, and sexual diversity studies. Here, drawing on authors like Butler (*Gender Trouble*; *Bodies that Matter*), Laqueur (*Making Sex*), and Fausto-Sterling (*Sexing the Body*) allowed going over the historical and political transformations of the categories of *sex* and *gender*, from their analogy with the nature/culture pair to the idea of gender as a matrix underpinning all sexual categories. Transfeminist and queer theories were also borrowed from to argue that the notion of *sexual difference*, associated in some feminist currents with the feminine/masculine duality, should be reinterpreted as a multiplicity.[20] But, in order to understand the social context of Argentinean transgender persons and their distinct views on gender identity, South American Transvestite Theory was absolutely essential. Its origin lies in the struggle for transgender human rights in Argentina during the decade of 1990, which quickly became an elaborate collective production that combines political

[18]The full title translates to "*Theory and methodology of linguistic research. The Synchronic-Diachronic Method for the Linguistic Analysis of Texts*." Social psychology defines social representations as mental entities connected with belief, which significantly condition our acts of comprehension and communication, and, therefore, shape our common sense and our understanding of reality. See, Moscovici, Serge. *Social Representations. Explorations in Social Psychology*. Polity Press, 2000, p. 33. Authors dealing with discourse analysis took special interest in the role of discourse in the (re)production of social representations: van Dijk, for example, states that a core interest of CDA should be "how specific discourse structures determine specific mental processes, or facilitate the formation of specific social representations" (259). For Pardo, the concept of *social representation* is more complex and encompassing than the concept of *discursive representation*, as it involves more than verbal and written language: social representations also include images, physical and emotional experiences, among other experiences, that are not necessarily linguistic or easily verbalized (*Teoría y metodología* 65). For example, the social representation of poverty in a given context can involve different discursive practices, such as news pieces, political speech, and everyday conversation, which will shape specific discursive representations that can be linguistically traced: for example, the poor may be discursively represented, through specific word choices and structures, as a dangerous threat to public space, or as citizens deprived of their rights. But the social representation of poverty will also involve individual and collective images, memories, and emotions that are not always conscious or cannot always be verbalized.

[19]This is a very general description of the method for the linguistic analysis of texts proposed by Pardo in *Teoría y metodología*, which, for reasons of space, I cannot fully elaborate here. For a detailed account of discursive categories and how to obtain them, see, *Teoría y metodología* 65–87.

[20]As does, for example, Preciado: "This paradigm shift may mark the passage from sex, gender and sexual difference (a binary opposition, whether considered as dialectical or complementary, as duality or duel) to an endless number of differences of bodies, of unidentified and unidentifiable desires" (74).

action with the critique of binary thought applied to all forms of identity, and has transcended Argentina's borders in joining a net of authors in countries like Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.[21] In my research process, placing a deliberate emphasis on the production of trans theorists-activists like Lohana Berkins, Marlene Wayar, Diana Sacayán, Alba Rueda and the collective Mocha Celis reaffirmed the value of local sources as part of a decolonial turn. South American Transvestite Theory supplied fundamental concepts like *transvestism as a political identity* and *social transvesticide*. The first asserts the non-binary, non-substantive (that is, not based on a stable, immutable essence), internally heterogeneous, and transversal quality of transgender identities, highlighting their intrinsic connection with social and political struggle in terms of power, inequality, and rights. The second elaborates on the structural conditions and consequences of the violence received by transgender people, as "an ensemble of repeated practices, sedimented through time and in the institutions, that we suffer due to our gender identities" (Berkins, *Cumbia* 123).[22]

The third and last part of the theoretical frame consisted of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of difference (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*), which places difference, conceived as the affirmative production of ever-changing multiplicities, at the heart of ontology.[23] In this ontology of pure variation, where identity has been removed from its traditional station as first principle, the concept of *becoming* designates the transformative processes that permanently underlie, sustain, and alter our very existence. Every identity is inherently precarious, because it is not founded on division or transcendence (for example, between the subject and the object, God and the world, man and animal, etc.), but rather on the immanence of all modes of being within the same ontological plane. According to this view, then, "what we are is not what distinguishes us from other forms of being, but what links us to them" (Ferreyra 118–119).[24] For my research, it was especially important to underline the role of becomings in the constitution of subjectivity, their political minority in relation with dominant identities, and their ties to language through the concepts of *sobriety* and the *semiotic of the plane of consistency* (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 263–

[21]See, Soich, Matías. "Becoming-practice. Deleuze and South American Transvestite Theory." *Continental and Comparative Philosophy*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2021, pp. 6–20; and "Crónica del pensamiento travesti-trans para una filosofía latinoamericana (Chronicle of transvestite-trans thought for a Latin American philosophy)." *Ideas, revista de filosofía moderna y contemporánea*, no. 15–16, 2022, pp. 104–114.

[22]The original quote reads "un conjunto de prácticas reiteradas, sedimentadas en el tiempo y las instituciones, que sufrimos debido a nuestras identidades de género."

[23]My participation in the Argentinean research group "Deleuze: ontología práctica" ("Deleuze: practical ontology"), led by Julián Ferreyra, has been decisive in this point. This group has been collectively studying the ontology of *Difference and Repetition* and its philosophical, scientific, and artistic sources since 2006. Most of its productions can be freely downloaded at https://deleuziana.com.ar/; some have been translated into English and published. See, Olkowski, Dorothea, and Julián Ferreyra (editors). *Deleuze at the End of the World. Latin American Perspectives*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2020; Jones, David, et al. (editors). "Ideas in Finisterre (special issue)." *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2021.

[24]The original quote reads "lo que somos no consiste en lo que nos distingue de las otras formas de ser sino en lo que nos enlaza con ellas."

264).[25] Finally, the Deleuzian concept of *becoming* was linked to transgender identities through the notion of a non-binary, molecular sexuality.[26]

[25]For Deleuze and Guattari, the plane of consistency is the immanent ontological and metaphysical space that is created and occupied by the multiple processes of difference and becoming (*A Thousand Plateaus* 70–71, 265–267). When a totalizing measure or unit—fixed forms such as the Organism, the Self, the Subject, or the State—is added to this plane, another space is created: the transcendent plane of organization, opposed but inevitably tied to the plane of consistency. For these authors, some linguistic elements and uses express more adequately than others the dynamics of this plane, producing a *semiotic of the plane of consistency*. This semiotic "has freed itself from both formal significances and personal subjectifications" (263). The authors describe three main linguistic components of said semiotic: the infinitive verb, which "expresses the floating, nonpulsed time […] of the pure event or of becoming" (263); the proper name, which "does not indicate a subject" but "fundamentally designates something that is of the order of the event" and "marks a longitude and a latitude" (264); and the indefinite article and indefinite pronoun, which "are lacking a determination only insofar as they are applied to a form that is itself indeterminate […] [but] lack nothing when they introduce haecceities, events, the individuation of which does not pass into a form and is not effected by a subject" (264). What all these elements have in common is that they are obtained by subtraction: one obtains the infinitive verb by subtracting person, tense, and mode; one obtains a proper name or an indefinite pronoun by subtracting subjective and personal determinations (264). For Deleuze and Guattari, subtraction is then a creative process that clears the way for expressing the plane of consistency, as it removes the fixed forms and measures that prevent its constitution: "the multiple *must be made*, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety. […] Subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted; write at n-1 dimensions" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 6). In this sense, *sobriety* is not just a trait of the semiotic of the plane of consistency, but also an expressive method and a creative treatment of language (104–105).

[26]Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between two regimes: the molar and the molecular. See, Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. U of Minnesota P, 1983. The former refers to the regime of the macro, that is, to formations that involve a central point of unification and, therefore, a localizable and recognizable identity (some examples of molar formations are: at the inorganic level, forms and qualities; at the organic, species and the organism; at the socio-political level, the subject, the signifier, and the State). The molecular, on the other hand, corresponds to the regime of the micro, which is not a scaled reduction of the molar (as if it were a matter of the individual versus the collective). On the contrary, the molecular is affirmed in and of itself (*Anti-Oedipus* 287–288). In contrast with the molar phenomena of unification and centralization, the molecular refers to decentralized processes of differentiation: a proliferation that underlies all actuality, and whose "ultimate" elements are neither localizable nor quantifiable according to statistical laws. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari affirm that all becomings are molecular (275), since becoming is not an identification with another subject, a transformation of one actual form into another, or an act of imitation, but rather "a verb with a consistency all of its own" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 239). It is a process, an impersonal force that passes *between* identifiable forms and subjects, dragging them into new compositions. However, the relation between the molar and the molecular is not of simple opposition. Both regimes coexist and affect or subordinate each other in an ever unstable balance. In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that molecular becomings always start from molar forms (272), and that there is always a correlation between them, so that "no flow, no becoming-molecular escapes from a molar formation without molar components accompanying it, forming passages or perceptible landmarks for the imperceptible processes" (303).

The distinction between these two regimes, which pervades Deleuze and Guattari's thought, is also operative in sexuality. The authors differentiate a molar sexuality, which unifies and organizes bodies around binary oppositions (male-female, heterosexual-homosexual), and a molecular sexuality, which breaks with this scheme and makes sexual differences proliferate: "The same applies for sexuality: it is badly explained by the binary organization of the sexes, and just as badly by a bisexual organization within each sex. Sexuality brings into play too great a diversity of conjugated becomings; these are like *n* sexes […] Sexuality is the production of a thousand sexes, which are so many uncontrollable becomings" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 278). Suggestively, throughout their work, the authors often link molecular sexuality (*n* sexes) with transsexuality and transvestism: "everywhere a microscopic transsexuality, resulting in the woman containing as many men as the man, and the man as many women, all capable of entering […] into

This threefold composite provided the theoretical frame for interpreting the results of a rigorous, exhaustive textual analysis of the corpus that involved the combined use of several qualitative theories and methods. For reasons of space, I can only mention them here: they are the Synchronic-Diachronic Method for the Linguistic Analysis of Texts (Pardo, *Teoría y metodología*), the theories of information hierarchization and tonalization (Lavandera; Pardo, *Teoría y metodología*), Halliday and Matthiessen's classification of process types, and Lakoff and Johnson's classification of conceptual metaphors.[27] Analysis of the corpus through these combined methods revealed a large number of linguistic resources systematically interconnected in several linguistic strategies, which in turn converged in four macro-strategies. In what follows, I will briefly describe each macro-strategy and how it shaped particular aspects of the discursive representation of gender identity.[28]

The first macro-strategy constructed gender identity as a *process* that develops over time: something that, for each person, *occurs* or *passes*. The linguistic resources

relations of production of desire that overturn the statistical [molar] order of the sexes. Making love is not just becoming as one, or even two, but becoming as a hundred thousand. […] not one or even two sexes, but *n* sexes" (*Anti-Oedipus* 295–296); "social structure and psychic identification leave too many special factors unaccounted for: the linkage, unleashing, and communication of the becomings triggered by the transvestite" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 278).

[27]Perhaps the most salient feature of the REDLAD's approach to CDA is questioning the Latin American acritical reception of European and Anglo-Saxon theories and methods, that is, the concern with the decolonization of knowledge in Discourse Studies. See, Resende, Viviane de Melo (editor). *Decolonizar os estudos críticos do discurso* [*Decolonizing critical discourse studies*]. Pontes, 2019. Not only our theories about language, but also the problems, bibliography, and analytical methods most frequent in Latin American CDA still show a strong colonising influence from the global North (Pardo, "Decolonização do conhecimento nos estudos do discurso" ["Decolonizing knowledge in discourse studies"]. *Decolonizar os estudos críticos do discurso*, edited by Viviane de Melo Resende, Pontes, 2019, pp. 47–62). In this sense, the current challenge for Latin American discourse researchers is the creation of theories, methodologies, and methods that account for the role of discourse in Latin American problems and contexts, as "decolonizing is not just resisting, but also creating new paradigms" (Pardo, qtd. in de Carvalho, Tatiana Lourenço, et al. "Una mirada hacia los estudios decoloniales y sus impactos en la educación y la enseñanza de lenguas y literaturas: diálogo con María Laura Pardo [A look at decolonial studies and their impact on education and the teaching of languages and literature: a dialogue with María Laura Pardo]." *Revista Leia Escola*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2022, pp. 132–141; the original quote reads "descolonizar no es sólo resistir, sino también construir nuevos paradigmas"). The Synchronic-Diachronic Method for the Linguistic Analysis of Texts was created precisely in this spirit (Pardo, *Teoría y metodología*; "Hate Speech We Live By." *The Routledge Handbook of Cultural Discourse Studies*, edited by Shi-xu, Routledge, 2023, pp. 327–345). For a methodological account of how this method was expanded and integrated with the others mentioned above, see, Pardo, María Laura, et al. "El Método Sincrónico-Diacrónico de Análisis Lingüístico de Textos y sus extensiones: una propuesta metodológica desde América Latina (The Synchronic-Diachronic Method for the Linguistic Analysis of Texts and its Extensions: A Methodological Proposal from Latin America)." *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios del Discurso*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2020, pp. 24–48.

[28]For a full account of these macro-strategies, with linguistic examples and explanations, see Soich, "Los devenires"; "De la esencia al proceso. Análisis lingüístico de la construcción de representaciones discursivas sobre la identidad de género en historias de vida de personas trans (From essence to process: A linguistic analysis of the construction of discursive representations about gender identity in the life stories of trans people)." *Romanica Olomucensia*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2018, pp. 21–42; and "La exclusión empieza por casa. Análisis crítico de la construcción de la representación discursiva de la identidad de género trans en relación con la familia y otros actores sociales (Exclusion begins at home. A critical analysis of the construction of discursive representation of transgender identity in relation to the family and other social actors)." *Cadernos de Linguagem e Sociedade*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2019a, pp. 173–200.

involved here emphasized the temporal aspects of gender identity (such as onset, duration, and periodization, in statements like 'I'm doing my construction as a trans person *constantly*'). Gender identity was also defined through actions carried out by the speaker, associated especially with conscious perception (in statements like 'I started to *understand* what was happening to me'), emotions ('going after a *passion*'), verbal activity ('I didn't *communicate* it'), and abstract relations like *being* and *having* ('they told me I *was* so,' 'Everything you *have* is bad').[29] While these actions are discursively highlighted, their "objective" counterparts (the corresponding "objects" of perception, emotion, talk, etc.) were discursively mitigated through the use of infinitive and impersonal verbs, indefinite pronouns and articles, and other "void" words (that is, words with very diffused, abstract, or little meaning, such as 'what,' 'so,' and 'it' in the examples above). In this sense, the discursive representation of gender identity selected the aspect of transience (linked to processes) over the aspect of permanence (linked to discrete participants) (Halliday and Matthiessen). Gender identity linguistically featured as a process that, while appearing to be carried out by a subject, was also fundamentally represented as a "something," closer to the impersonal event—to that which *occurs* or *happens*—than to the permanent existence of a well-defined substance.

The second macro-strategy constructed gender identity as a phenomenon linked to the elaboration and "possession" of images and appearances, the use of clothing, and the performance of physical and verbal behaviour. Since these elements belong to the realm of the manifest, the backside of this representation was the possibility of rendering gender identity invisible (by actions like camouflaging, concealing, and hiding) to avoid the prejudiced stare of others. Thus, whereas the first macro-strategy represented gender identity as a succession of actions and processes, the second represented identity as *a way of carrying them out*. In this sense, different gendered possibilities (among which are masculinity and femininity) appeared as "styles" or "ways" of acting in the world.

The third macro-strategy connected these representations of gender identity with their familial and social context, emphasizing the multiple acts of violence and exclusion exerted on transgender people. This produced a discursive representation that highlighted the nuclear family as a social actor, either by its discriminatory and expulsive role, or by its provision of acceptance and support when presented with disruptive gender identities. Familial agency was further emphasized by the fact that actions from other social groups or spaces—such as the school, work, and health institutions—were discursively mitigated by omitting the concrete mention of their corresponding agents. For example, statements that describe school and work violence in terms such as "there were other hard things" and "there was mistreatment" only allude to that violence through general words (like "things") and nominalizations (like "mistreatment"), which avoid specifically mentioning *what* those "things" are or *who* is actually mistreating. In contrast, a statement such as "my mother had two things: first, hitting me a lot, she hit me a lot. A real lot she

[29]These statements are taken from the corpus of life stories. Among other similar examples, they are analysed in detail in Soich, "Los devenires" 337–360.

hit me," familial violence and its agent are made explicit and are increasingly reinforced through the repetition of verbs like "hit" and quantifiers like "a lot."[30]

The fourth and last macro-strategy constructed a representation of the general social context derived from those violent and discriminatory actions. The communicative goal of this macro-strategy was to present the immediate consequences of social exclusion on the life stories of transgender people, especially in terms of their numerous shortcomings (with lack of stable and well-paid jobs standing out) and of prostitution as one of the few socially tolerated alternatives after expulsion from the familial home.

These are the main aspects of the discursive representation of gender identity, obtained in my doctoral research by the linguistic analysis of transgender people's life stories. In the next section, I will elaborate on several conceptual connections involving these results, which were key to introducing the main proposal of this paper: that the concept of *assemblage* should be used as an interpretative lens for the process of interdisciplinary research.

Gender Identity: The Many Facets of a Concept

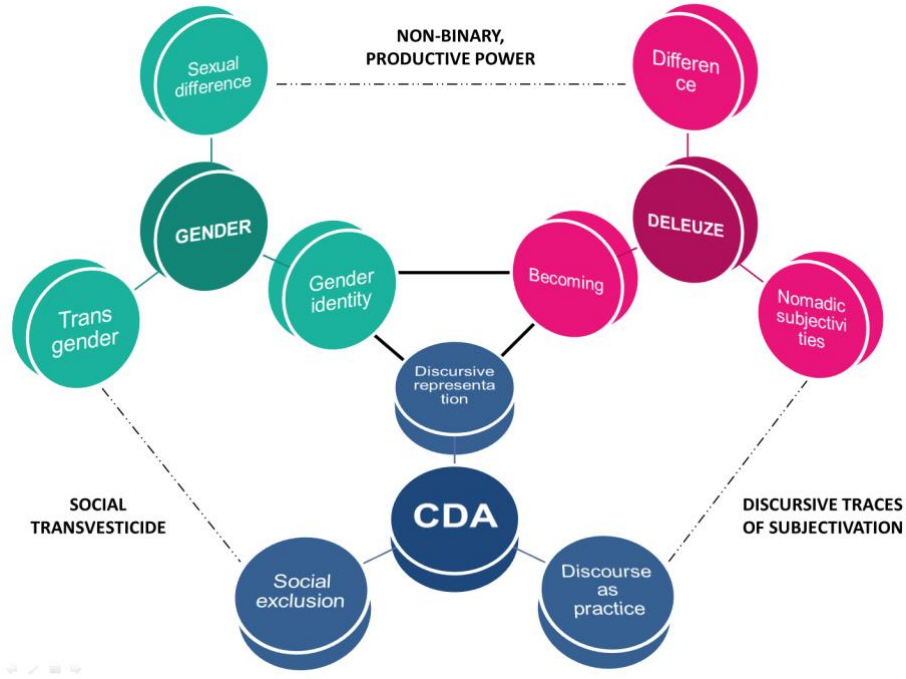

Fig. 1: "Conceptual molecule" of interdisciplinary conceptual connections. Graphic made by the author.

The insights about gender identity produced during this research were linked not only to the linguistic components of its discursive representation (the four macro-strategies described above), but also to profound philosophical and political views on this subject.

[30]These statements are taken from the corpus of life stories. Among other similar examples, they are analysed in detail in Soich, "Los devenires" 377–401 and in Soich, "La exclusión empieza por casa" (see footnote 28 for the complete reference).

In other words, elaborating on these insights implied connecting concepts from the three fields of the theoretical framework. The graphic (Fig. 1) illustrates these connections in the form of a "conceptual molecule."[31] In this "molecule," each coloured cluster represents one of the research's theoretical fields: CDA; (trans)feminist, gender and sexual diversity studies (shortened as "Gender"); and Deleuzian philosophy (shortened as "Deleuze"). The connections between the three central circular shapes, indicated by full black lines, define the core of the research: a critical analysis of the construction of *discursive representations* of *gender identity* in transgender people's life stories, interpreted through the Deleuzian concept of *becoming*.

The broken lines indicate connections between concepts closely associated to the core. The concepts thus connected are not necessarily homologous, and yet, maybe for this reason, they produce a certain resonance that opens up a space of interdisciplinary composition. The first connection links *social exclusion*—a privileged focus of Latin American CDA—with the concept of *transgender*—a major destabilization of the dominant normalization of gender—through the notion of *social transvesticide*. As we said earlier, the latter refers to the effects of social and institutional violence suffered by transgender people on account of their gender identity (Berkins, *Cumbia*).

Secondly, *sexual difference*—a concept belonging to feminist theory—and *difference*—a key Deleuzian philosophical concept—are connected in terms of their *non-binary, productive power*. Here, on the one hand, I agree with Butler in affirming that the social, and hence also discursive, production of sexed modes of subjectivity overflows and contests the binary model of the heterosexual matrix (*Gender Trouble*; *Bodies that Matter*). On the other hand, following Deleuze, difference is the pivotal ontological force that subtends and capsizes all dualistic forms of representation (opposition, contradiction, limitation, etc.), making them the secondary product of the affirmative power of virtual and intensive multiplicities (*Difference and Repetition* 244–245, 266–267). I believe this philosophical view should be extended to the feminist concept of *sexual difference*, to apprehend it as an affirmative power that produces a multiplicity of sexed and gendered subjective modes of being, and to liberate it from the restrictive binary model still predominant in some feminist currents.[32]

[31]The word "molecule" is not intended here as an intentional reference to the Deleuzian concept of the molecular (see footnote 26), but rather arises from the similarity of the Graphic to traditional chemistry diagrams. However, as will become clear in section 5, this use is akin to the concept of the assemblage derived from Deleuzian thought, because it concerns how different connections can define the identity of the whole in a variable way.

[32]In this line of thought, Georgina Bertazzo focuses on the biological sources of Deleuzian ontology and their implications for the feminist concepts of sex and body: "One of the central dichotomies in Western epistemology is the sex-gender system, sustained by the traditional nature/culture distinction. Different feminist currents dwell upon that distinction and, sometimes, reproduce the same oppressive and exclusive logic they are trying to oppose." The original quote reads "una de las dicotomías centrales en la epistemología occidental es el sistema sexo-género, que se sostiene por la tradicional distinción naturaleza-cultura, y sobre ella se montan distintas corrientes feministas que en algunos casos reproducen las mismas lógicas opresivas y excluyentes que tratan de combatir." In her works, Bertazzo addresses, from a Deleuzian perspective, how the dichotomist model of nature/culture, woman/man, masculine/feminine, etc., pervades some radical feminist positions, concerning assisted reproductive technology and the LGBTIQ+ collective, especially intersex and transgender people. See, Bertazzo, Georgina. "Cuerpos y

Thirdly, we have the notion of *nomadic subjectivities*, proposed by feminist Deleuzian philosopher Braidotti as a sustainable basis for the political cartography of contemporary subjects. She characterizes nomadic subjectivities by their fragmentation, their constant displacements and negotiations, the non-coincidence of the subject with its conscience, and the dissolution of its boundaries with other forms of existence. In this sense, subjective identity is a retrospective notion, a collection of traces:

> The nomad's identity is a map of where s/he has been; s/he can always reconstruct it a posteriori, as a set of steps in an itinerary. But there is no triumphant *cogito* supervising the contingency of the self; the nomad stands for movable diversity, the nomad's identity is an inventory of traces. (Braidotti 14)

My research focused on the linguistic materialization of these traces regarding nomadic (gender) identity. By "linguistic materialization," I mean not only the linguistic elements that mark the speaker's presence in the uttered proposition (like the use of shifters, modality and evaluative terms) (Kerbrat-Orecchioni), but the complex convergence of semantic and syntactic resources (metaphors, enforcing and mitigating terms, verbal processes, and word order, among others) within categories that emerge when people engage in a specific discursive activity: talking about themselves and telling their stories. These stories about the self are discursive practices that actualize the identity function of *discourse as a social practice* (Fairclough 64). They are also, following Braidotti, a posteriori reconstructions of a *nomadic subjective itinerary*. Therefore, studying the linguistic resources that make up these stories is a way of accessing the *discursive traces of subjectivation*, conceived as an on-going process.

What do these interdisciplinary connections tell us about gender identity *as a concept*? An image that comes to mind here is that of a gem: each theoretical field allows contemplating a single "facet" of this concept. For example, from the perspective of CDA, we can see *gender identity as a discursive representation*. Discursive representations are produced in particular discursive practices (here, telling life stories), rooted in specific social contexts (here, the Argentinean context of inequality and organized collective resistance). Also, discursive representations are (re)constructed from linguistic resources and strategies that emerge from concrete textual analysis (here, the four linguistic macro-strategies summarized in the previous section). Being part of discursive and social practices, texts are not just finished products, but *events* that take place in and shape a world of dialectically intertwined components (Chouliaraki and Fairclough; Pardo, "Estado del área").[33] In this sense, gender identity as a discursive representation is a product that points out to a larger process: a composition of situated (social, discursive, political) forces.

órganos. Reflexiones sobre la Idea biológica y el dimorfismo sexual en *Diferencia y repetición* [Bodies and organs. Reflections on the biological Idea and sexual dimorphism in *Difference and repetition*]." *Las potencias del continuo. Deleuze: ontología práctica 3* (*The potencies of the continuum. Deleuze: practical ontology 3*), edited by Sebastián Amarilla, Georgina Bertazzo and Gonzalo Santaya, RAGIF, 2021, pp. 141–154.

[33]The full title translates to "Basic state of the art for an introduction to Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis."

But then, from the perspective of transgender theory and activism, we can also see *gender identity as a crucial component of embodied human experience*, which has been historically organized on the basis of binary models of sexual difference. The increasing visibility and impact of transgender politics in the last decades has launched the concept of gender identity as a powerful site of rupture with dominant social models. In this sense, gender identity has provided an integral and far-reaching critical point of view on different aspects of social life, from affectivity and education to income distribution and modes of production. It has allowed articulating new voices, new stances on life, and new sensibilities, a remarkable example being Argentinean transvestism (Berkins, "Travestis").[34] In sum, the concept of gender identity as a component of embodied human experience has placed an immanent, radical critique of how gender contributes to the distribution and organization of power in our contemporary societies.

Finally, from the perspective of Deleuzian philosophy, we can see *gender identity as a momentary arresting point* in the ontological process that is constantly forming and un-forming nomadic subjectivities: the transient substance of being that Deleuze and Guattari call *becomings*. In this regard, the emphasis on the discursive aspects of identity provided an interesting new approach to some of these Deleuzian concepts. For example, in the first macro-strategy described in the previous section, gender identity was discursively produced by alternating between "void" linguistic elements (such as indefinite pronouns and abstract nouns), and "full" linguistic elements that bear traditional gender meanings (nouns and adjectives like 'man,' 'woman,' 'masculine,' 'pink,' etc.). In this alternation, the "void" elements create a space of semantic indeterminacy or *sobriety*, which can be related to the *semiotic of the plane of consistency* that expresses becomings (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 263–264; see also footnote 25). This means that the disruption of the binary norm by transgender identities is textually performed by the strategic use of certain linguistic forms. Conversely, these forms were interpreted as "perceptible landmarks for the imperceptible processes" of becoming (*A Thousand Plateaus* 303; see also footnote 26). In other words, these linguistic forms were considered discursive traces of the molecular becoming of sexuality enabled by transgender identities (Soich, "Sobre los índices discursivos").[35]

Concepts as Assemblages

In the previous section, gender identity has been considered through the metaphor of a gem. Discursive analysis, (trans)gender theories, and Deleuzian philosophy were directed towards the critical study of this concept, each field being a different point of view that revealed one of said concept's "facets." As a result, four linguistic macro-strategies that represent gender identity as a situated phenomenon were detected; transgender identity was interpreted as an instance of the molecular becoming of sexuality; and specific linguistic elements were correlated with ontological concepts, tracing molecular becomings in discourse.

There is a philosophical setback, however, to this gem metaphor. If we think of a complex concept, like gender identity, as "multifaceted," we are assuming it has a hidden

[34]The full title translates to "Transvestites: a political identity."
[35]The full title translates to "On the discursive indexes of the molecular becoming of sexuality."

underlying unity. No matter how complex it is, how many facets we assign to it, we are still invoking a central convergence point that guarantees the concept's coherence as an epistemological "object," and its corresponding adjustment to the faculties of the knowing subject (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 133–134). For the sake of progressive scientific plurality, we can deem that coherence as ultimately unattainable, and yet still desirable as an ideal; we should strive towards simultaneously seeing as many "facets" as possible. The problem with this is that we would still be treating the concepts we use for understanding social phenomena in additive terms, as successive layers of interpretation that add up until eventually reaching a stable configuration. This is not far from the spirit of the transcendent and totalizing ideal that Deleuze called the dogmatic Image of thought (131).

But we are currently living in a world where the relentlessly accelerating forces of neoliberal capitalism promote subjectivation processes oriented towards instant gratification and the consumption of fragmented, fleeting images. A world where ultraconservative liberalism exalts an atomistic and self-subsistent ideal of individuality in the hollowed name of freedom, and collective ideals of social justice barely struggle to resist such impervious eroding forces. In such a world, critical social science concerned with politically emancipatory and epistemologically explanatory goals (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 29–35) must procure concepts that, far from stabilizing differences to produce "complete" objects, can be both flexible and consistent enough to tune in to—and at the same time withstand, modify, or counter—the dynamics imposed by these heterogeneous, conflicting forces at play.

So, if envisioning its concepts as multifaceted totalities is not suitable in the long run for the goals of critical social science, what is? I would like to suggest a Deleuzian-based approach: that interdisciplinary concepts, such as "gender identity" in this case, be thought of not as totalities stabilized around a central unity—even if these totalities are "open"—but in terms of *assemblages*. The concept of assemblage is prominent in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, but here I will specifically resort to DeLanda's take on it (*A New Philosophy* 3–4). DeLanda proposes assemblages as the basis for a realist (but not essentialist) social ontology, in which multiple scales interact in a non-centralized way.[36] He defines assemblages as wholes constructed from heterogeneous parts, which maintain, among themselves and with the whole, *relations of exteriority*.[37] This means, in the first place, that the parts of an assemblage do not relate, neither between themselves nor to the assemblage as a whole, in terms of an internal logic that would bind them necessarily. In other words, assemblages and their parts do not have "essential" properties that depend on maintaining always the same set of relations. Correspondingly, it also means that the parts of an assemblage can be detached from it

[36]What follows is a very partial sketch of DeLanda's definition of assemblages, centered on those properties that specifically inspired my reflection. Invoking these properties does not imply agreement with all of DeLanda's ontological premises (for example, I do not fully agree with the subordinate place he assigns to language in relation with the social).

[37]DeLanda's theory is proposed specifically as a social ontology. However, being based on an immanent philosophy, its central concept, the assemblage, operates at all levels and scales, be it the inorganic, the organic, or the social. Consequently, examples of assemblages given by DeLanda include atoms and genes, words and language, organisms and individual persons, families, network communities, social organizations, and political and territorial institutions.

and put in another assemblage, where they may display different interactions without losing their identity (*A New Philosophy* 10).

Another important point about assemblages and their components is the distinction between their properties and their capacities, a distinction that "is roughly that between *what an entity is and what it can do*" (DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory* 52). The properties of an entity may form a given and closed list, but the extent of its capacities remains open, on account of its potential interaction with other entities. In this sense, the exteriority that defines the relations between assemblages and their parts means that the properties of an assemblage cannot be reduced to the sum of the properties of its parts. This is because the properties of an assemblage are derived, not directly from its components' properties (as would happen if they were bound by an internal, "essential" logic), but from the exercise of its components' capacities (what they *can do*), which depend on their potential encounters with other entities and therefore are open to variation (*A New Philosophy* 11).

These definitions, which depend on the exteriority of the constitutive relations between an assemblage and its components, have two important consequences. First, since none of its parts are essentially tied to the whole by a rigid set of internal relations, an assemblage has what we could call a mobile or "flexible" identity. The properties of an assemblage (what it *is*) emerge from the actual exercise of its parts' capacities. And the parts of an assemblage can be removed from it and plugged into another assemblage, where they may exert different capacities. Therefore, an assemblage's identity is flexible and subject to change. Secondly, since the properties of the parts of an assemblage depend on their encounters with other entities, which can trigger new capacities, the interaction between the parts "may result in a true synthesis" (*A New Philosophy* 11). Assemblages have thus synthetic power, in the original sense of the Greek *syn-thesis* (com-position): the mobile compositions and combinations of their parts result in productive and creative effects.[38]

In light of this, I believe critical social sciences, which intend "to contribute to an awareness of what is, how it has come to be, and what it might become, on the basis of which people may be able to make and remake their lives" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 4), should treat its target concepts as assemblages that involve, as their components, different interdisciplinary dimensions. The research I have presented before is intended as an example of this, centered around the concept of gender identity. This concept is not a "multifaceted gem," that is, a unified entity I had to approach from different angles in order to retrieve its ultimate coherence. Instead, gender identity was synthetically produced as a concept by "plugging" together different dimensions: linguistic and discursive (categories, words and structures, word order, etc.), theoretical (methodological, social, and gender concepts), political and activist (participating in a transgender organization, working towards social inclusion, going to demonstrations,

[38]In this sense, DeLanda's use of the word "synthesis" is in line with its traditional philosophical meaning: a union or integration of elements whose result is more complex than the elements themselves. The productive and creative aspects of synthesis were specially stressed by German idealism: "synthesis joins and, in joining, 'produces' what is joined." The original quote reads "la síntesis une y, al unir, 'produce' lo unido." See, Ferrater Mora, José. *Diccionario de filosofía. Tomo II* (*Philosophy Dictionary. Volume II*). Sudamericana, 1999, p. 685.

etc.), interpersonal and affective (relating with others, getting to know them, talking with them about their life stories), and ontological (a particular conception and experience of difference and becoming), into a complex interdisciplinary assemblage. The "conceptual molecule" presented before (see Fig. 1) accounts for the connections between some of these dimensions and their components.

Treating these (linguistic, political, ontological, etc.) dimensions as components of an assemblage means they are not linked by internal logical necessity. As DeLanda says, such a necessity "may be investigated by thought alone"; while the relations here at stake "involve a consideration of empirical questions" (*A New Philosophy* 11). Investigating on gender identity requires more than reflecting on it from a certain theoretical standpoint. To define the parts and relations of the "conceptual molecule," it was first necessary to deal with many practical questions, such as what are the social conditions that define someone as transgender, what are the concrete consequences of that definition and what can be done about them, which specific people should be interviewed and how to approach them, what linguistic forms appeared in their discourses as particularly significant, and so on. The ensuing interdisciplinary dimensions emerged in the process of attending to these questions, as different connections were tried, and the productivity of some of them was gradually confirmed. In this sense, then, the relations that make up the "conceptual molecule" are both contingent and obligatory (*A New Philosophy* 11): they could have been otherwise, but their current disposition was required by the exertion of this particular assemblage's capacities in its given context.

By the same token, since their relations are of exteriority, the dimensions of this assemblage/concept of gender identity are not fixedly interlocked. They could be taken apart and reanalysed, regrouped, subtracted, complemented, or replaced by other components from the same or different theoretical fields, depending on the coordinates of the phenomenon under study. For example, depending on the geographical and cultural location, South American Transvestite Theory could be replaced by other situated theories and concepts on transgender; instead of identity, a different gender-related concept could be explored, which would require an adjustment of the philosophical concepts, and so on. This points to the mobile or flexible identity of the assemblage in the sense described above, that is, as an emergent from its parts' variable capacities. This way, treating concepts as interdisciplinary assemblages can suit the flexibility requirements of CDA theory as "a shifting synthesis of other theories," that aims at "shed[ding] light on the dialectic of the semiotic and the social in a wide variety of social practices by bringing to bear shifting sets of theoretical resources and shifting operationalisations of them" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 16–17). The assemblage's mobility and flexibility could match well these authors' emphasis on the *shifting* quality of theories and operationalisations.

As was said before, the properties of an assemblage emerge from what it can do, that is, from the variable set of its parts' capacities, which are defined by their encounters and interactions with other entities. This accounts for the assemblage's synthetic power. In the case presented here, the properties of the assemblage/concept of gender identity emerged from the interactions between its different dimensions, which imply not only producing a theoretical interpretation of gender identity, molecular becomings, and social exclusion, but also many interactions with different social, political, and governmental

actors. In the context of this research, my active involvement in the LGBTIQ+ social organization Mocha Celis becomes a foremost example of an interaction, without which the theoretical, political, and ontological dimensions of this assemblage would never have entered into their actual relations. Other interactions that defined this assemblage/ concept's capacities involved governmental instances, such as the Ombudsman for the Public of Audiovisual Communication Services (where, among other activists, I participated in a consultation session about gender-related violence against transgender people in the media), the National Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity (where I taught a special class on media and gender-related violence for the workers of the national telephone line that provides assistance in situations of gender-based violence), and a National Criminal and Correctional Federal Prosecutor's Office (with which I collaborated by revising an opinion in the first stance that requested the dismissal of a transgender woman accused of lesser drug dealing, my doctoral thesis being quoted as part of the grounds for the request).

Needless to say, an assemblage's consistency and the efficacy of its capacities are not warranted by its mobility alone, but must be gained through situated experimentation, and trial and error. Being dependent on the capacities of its parts and their encounters with other entities, the identity of an assemblage is also inevitably subject to change. In this sense, the assemblage/concept of gender identity presented here as an example is the product of particular circumstances, and is not proposed as a general or permanent solution to the problem of the political and ontological stakes of identity.

Closing Remarks: Assemblages and a Casuistic Approach to Social Science

In the first sections of this paper, I have outlined my doctoral interdisciplinary research on a *discursive representation* intimately connected with subjectivity—*gender identity*—through the linguistic analysis of texts from specific discursive and social coordinates—life storytelling by transgender individuals in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, at the beginning of the 21st century. This analysis allowed selecting the linguistic components of that representation and interpreting them as *discursive traces* of an ontological process of nomadic subjectivation. This process was traversed by the *productive power* of sexual difference as an open, non-binary multiplicity (*becomings*); and at the same time, by the social exclusion and violence of a system based on the reduction of sexual difference to a binary model of sex/gender (*social transvesticide*).

As may be noticed, the above paragraph includes all the notions featured in the "conceptual molecule" (Fig. 1), with those in italics corresponding to its main connections. The concept of assemblage allowed reflecting on these connections and especially on their consistency. This concept was not operative during the research, in the sense that it was not included in the Deleuzian part of the theoretical frame, but emerged afterwards as a revealing interpretative key that allowed considering the investigative process as a whole, from the initial motivation that drove me towards these issues (such as my early personal connections with transgender people, their causes, and their suffering) to the *ex post* outcome of defending my thesis in terms of new personal and social interactions and effects (such as participating in a judiciary process directly aimed at modifying the social stigmatization and actual living conditions of the transgender collective). Through the concept of assemblage, the relations between

different theoretical and experiential fields can be seen as more than a simple aggregation or juxtaposition of elements: they were knit together into a singular, complex, and meaningful whole.

I believe employing the concept of assemblage for this kind of methodological reflection can inform research not just on gender identity, but on many social phenomena. Working on dense concepts like *identity*, *gender*, and *discourse* from this viewpoint enables a more daring and creative grasp of their composing relations. The exteriority of the relations between the whole and its parts defines assemblages as open and mobile entities. By treating concepts as interdisciplinary assemblages, one is more adept to consider previously unexplored, heterogeneous dimensions as possible operative components of the research process. By the same token, the identity of the research process is treated as not merely dependent on the logical relations between its central concepts, but also on their external relations. That is, on what those concepts can do: the extent of their capacities to enter into new relations with other (affective, social, political, etc.) entities.

If treating concepts as assemblages enhances their possibilities of entering into new external relations, it also favours considering them as situated compositions and as triggers for social action. This can result in an opportune blurring of the boundaries between theory and praxis, since working with assemblages can unlock processes of synthetic cooperation and mutual becoming. To mention a few examples, such is the case when a researcher becomes a member of the community under study, while other members become researchers themselves; when the discursive coordinates of academic genres (like thesis and dissertations) pervade other discursive genres and social practices (like judicial rulings, bills, and institutional recommendations) (Soich, "Entre la calle y la ley");[39] or when the dynamics of a street demonstration become an artistic piece of collective thought (Shock and MAfIA).

To conclude, I would like to underline that this approach stems from a line of thought that can be useful for CDA and Discourse Studies, and in general for the more explanatory and emancipatory goals of critical social sciences (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 4). In "The Method of Dramatization," Deleuze asserts that the crucial question in the philosophical exploration of the Idea is not *what is this?*, a question that "prematurely judges the Idea as simplicity of the essence" (*Desert Islands* 95). Instead, he upholds approaching the Idea as multiplicity, which is "much closer to the accident than to the abstract essence, and can be determined only with the questions *who? how? how much? where and when? in which case?*" (*Desert Islands* 96; italics in the original). In this sense, we can say that, for Deleuze, philosophy is not a mirror of essences, but a casuistry of accidents (*Desert Islands* 95). This *casuistic* philosophical approach can suit critical social science, whose aim is not to conceptually "mirror" the social, but to enhance our comprehension of it by intersecting concepts, discourses, and experiences, and by actively engaging in these intersections. In the case presented here, asking *what* gender identity *essentially is* proved less interesting and fruitful than inquiring into the accidental: *who* cares about gender identity and *for what*; *where* and *when* is gender

[39]The full title translates to "Between the street and the law: social and discursive changes concerning gender identity."

identity constructed, and *how*; *what can be done* about it, and so on. Casuistic questions like these are especially relevant when creating and experimenting with assemblages.

This proposal is based on reflections over my experience as a socially engaged researcher. As such, it is then necessarily limited. More limitations will be dictated by future assemblages' degree of success in producing satisfactory explanations and social interactions in their respective scenarios. However, I believe the potential of treating concepts as interdisciplinary assemblages is vast, encompassing gender, class, ethnic, and many other traditional intersectional aspects,[40] as well as institutions and movements operating in different scales. A common saying in Argentinean LGBTIQ+ activism is that *we must create the world we wish to live in*. Concepts as assemblages can contribute to thinking the world we currently live in and the one we wish to live in, in a way that can push thought into its fusing point with action.

[40]Regarding these aspects, Jasbir Puar has maintained that the concept of assemblage, which is "more attuned to interwoven forces," can dispel the still too rigid traits assigned by the intersectional model of identity. See, Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages. Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke UP, 2017, p. 212. In this paper, I have endeavoured to make a similar case focusing not on the intersectionality of identity, but on the interdisciplinarity of social concepts.

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