

The Power and Subjection of Liminality and Borderlands of Non-Binary Folx

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Abstract:

This essay explores Victor Turner's liminal spaces and Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands and how these spaces contain components of power that include the potentiality of liminal space, the access to knowledge and knowing, freedom from social constructs, and multiple subjectivities. By existing in an unintelligible state, folx who hold non-binary gender identities function within liminal spaces. Components found in liminal spaces and borderlands allow non-binary folx to possess a power that is not accessible to those confined within the structured gender binary. For this essay, I will utilize the term non-binary to refer to people who place themselves, or are forcibly placed, outside of the gender binary. I am using non-binary folx because I view this as an umbrella term that includes all of the above-mentioned labels, as non-binary implies functioning outside of the gender binary. Moreover, folx incorporates the x that is being widely used to bring in more identities to conversations, such as womxn, latinx, and alumx to name a few. While investigating the power that exists within liminal spaces and borderlands, the struggles that non-binary folx face are also explored. A search for home, an inability to enter into defined spaces, and lack of access to systems are some of the complexities that exist within these liminal spaces. These borderlands are sites of potential invisibility, misrecognition, and unintelligibility that restrict access to institutions as well as rights that are structured by the gender binary system. It is imperative that an investigation of these properties of liminal states and borderlands be done to create access to these institutions without negating the lived experiences of non-binary folx by forcing their classification within the gender binary.

1 Father/Mother. Light/Dark. White/Black. Western languages are built on a foundation of differences and comparisons. Concepts are understood by how they relate to or differ from other concepts already understood. A table is understood to be related to other furniture but differ from a chair in that one holds food while the other holds people. This comparison of difference creates a dichotomy of either one or the other. Rigid borders create a binary that places identities into an either/or positionality. The polarity that is created by the dichotomy establishes distinct borders around both sides of the binary.

2 By looking at the concepts of liminal space and borderlands, this essay will investigate the space that falls between the distinct borders of female and male gender identities. The concept of borderlands as a space for power has been applied to numerous groups of people who inhabit these fringes. Gloria Anzaldúa introduced her conception of identity in her 1987 book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Prior to Anzaldúa's borderlands, the concept of liminality existed as a space outside of definable social structures. The theory of a liminal state

came from Victor Turner's investigation of the rituals of the Nbembu tribe. Turner defines this space as "ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification" (*Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* 232). Although Turner presented this space as a place of transition, I argue that non-binary folx stay within a liminal space due to their unclassifiable identities. Although Anzaldúa and Turner look at these spaces differently, I argue that these two theories are in conversation with one another.

3 Turner's investigation of the Nbembu tribe is a case study of how members of the tribe move from one defined space to another through their rite of passage. The space one inhabits between the two structured identities was a phase he called the liminal phase. This phase, however, was not seen as a permanent phase.

4 In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa investigates the space that is undefined differently than Turner. For Anzaldúa, her investigation was more of a personal one. In her semi-autobiographical book, she discusses spaces between defined identities through her own personal experiences and identities. She looks at physical borders, such as the Mexican-American border, and her identity as a Chicana. Yet, she also discusses symbolic borders, such as men and women, and heterosexual and homosexual, and her identity as a lesbian who often finds herself functioning in traditionally female and male roles both.

5 Both Turner and Anzaldúa explore these places as transitory spaces. Turner presents this movement from the liminal phase to the structured phase as inevitable and necessary to enter back in to society. Anzaldúa, on the other hand, argues that even those who live within the borderlands must abide by certain expected rules to gain access, but does allow for the existence of folx who remain in the borderlands.

6 Another way in which Anzaldúa demonstrates her passage between borders is through the structure of her book. The first half of the book is written in essays describing Anzaldúa's lived experiences as a Chicana lesbian activist to challenge the concepts of bordered spaces. The second half of the book are poems written by Anzaldúa that allow the reader to relate to her experiences from a different access point. The book is written using English, as well as six variations of Spanish. Anzaldúa does this as another illustration, specifically to non-bilingual readers, of how access matters and being able to move within both languages affects this access.

7 This essay will investigate the ways in which non-binary folx exist within these liminal spaces and borderlands. I will also look at the components of power created through being positioned within these spaces. Liminal spaces and borderlands contain components of power that include the potentiality of liminal space, the access to knowledge and knowing, freedom from social constructs, and multiple subjectivities. These components allow non-binary folx to possess a power that is not accessible to those confined with the structured gender binary.

8 Although these spaces permit access to specific types of power, they are also sites of potential invisibility, misrecognition, and unintelligibility that restrict access to institutions as well as rights that are structured by the gender binary system. It is imperative that an investigation of these properties of liminal states and borderlands be done to create access to these institutions without negating the lived experiences of non-binary folx by forcing their classification within the gender binary.

Defining Terminology

9 People who hold identities outside of the male/female gender binary use several labels. Some of these labels include gender variant, gender non-binary, genderqueer, gender diverse, intersex, transgender, and non-binary folx. Additionally, there are certain distinctions made between these labels. However, for the purpose of this essay, I will utilize the term non-binary to refer to people who place themselves, or are forcibly placed, outside of the gender binary. I am using non-binary folx because I view this as an umbrella term that includes all of the above-mentioned labels, as non-binary implies functioning outside of the gender binary. Moreover, folx incorporates the x that is being widely used to bring in more identities to conversations, such as womxn, latinx, and alumx to name a few. In keeping with the intention of allowing non-binary folx an identity outside of the binary, I will also be utilizing the singular “they” and “them” when referencing a person outside of this binary if gender pronouns are not known for an individual. Though there are also many alternative pronouns to the ones representing the binary, such as “ze”, “hir” and “xe”, “they” has become widely used for much of the community, and has been added to the Oxford Dictionary, which I believe makes “they” more universally understood.

10 Throughout this essay, I will be using two concepts to define the spaces in which non-binary folx negotiate. Both spaces will be shown to be sites of power and freedom, while, conversely, creating an invisibility and lack of power. By being placed or placing oneself in a

position that is not directly defined by the mainstream discourse, non-binary folx initiate an interrogation of the rigid gender dichotomy.

11 The first concept explored to investigate the space non-binary folx are positioned within will be the term liminality. In 1967, Victor Turner established the idea of liminality through his study of the Ndembu rite of passage ritual in his book *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Turner breaks down the rite of passage ceremony into three distinct phases.

The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'); during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third phase the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and 'structural' type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards. (*The Forest of Symbols* 94)

For Turner, these stages were documented through a transition. Liminality, for him, was not a place one remained, but rather a place one passed through on their way back into social structure. The liminal stage created a space where the subject was able to redefine themselves within circumstances that have "few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (*The Forest of Symbols* 94). This stage, though, was a means to an end. The end was reached when the subject was able to place themselves back into the constructs of society. As cited above, this state, by virtue of its stability, has rights and obligations.

12 However, I will argue that this liminal space, outside of the constructs of society, allows for a space from which to deconstruct the notions society holds stable. Michael Joseph posits, "Someone whose personhood is liminal lives beyond the pale of society, or structure. For such persons, liminality is neither ritual nor transitional, but an open-ended way of life qualified by sets of cultural demands, ethical systems, and processes that are irreconcilable... outsiderhood and marginality defy reincorporation" (140). Thus, because of their inability to be defined, these bodies call into question the definitions of gender that are widely accepted. As Yang states in 2000, during her investigation on liminal spaces within social movements, "a liminal situation is characterized by freedom, egalitarianism, communion, and creativity. Freedom results from a rejection of those rules and norms that have structured social action prior to the liminal situation"

(383). This freedom is why I have chosen liminal spaces as the first of two spaces from which to work when investigating the potential non-binary folx have for social restructuring.

13 Although liminality helps to illustrate the space that non-binary folx occupy, there has been a significant amount of work since Turner's study around this undefined space that helps contextualize liminality more clearly. To extend the argument of liminal space, I look at Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of borderlands, which she outlines in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. According to Anzaldúa, "A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (3). As is evident in Anzaldúa's definition of borderlands, people who are positioned outside of a distinct boundary inhabit these spaces. In the case of non-binary folx, these bounded spaces are those of male and female. Individuals outside of male and female are forbidden to enter those defined spaces.

14 Turner and Anzaldúa's work creates an access point for which to understand the lived experiences of non-binary folx. However, neither theory truly parses apart the power and limitations that are found within these undefined spaces. Turner saw liminality as a temporary state and did not investigate the power that one could hold remaining in a liminal state. He investigated more the need to enter a structured state in order to gain access. Anzaldúa, analogously, looked at the ways in which borderlands confined the inhabitants. Though Anzaldúa took it further, arguing that the system and borders themselves were what confined the border dwellers. Turner did not critique the system the Nembu tribe functioned within, while Anzaldúa did actively critique the systems of gender, nations, sexuality, and more.

15 By utilizing Turner and Anzaldúa, I will parse apart the ideas of liminal space and borderlands and how undefined identities can negatively affect the lived experiences of non-binary folx, but that there is also an empowerment that exists when one dwells outside of structured identities. This essay will look at how access to systems that depend on defined identities is the site of difficulty when living outside of the binary.

16 Non-binary folx exist in a place that borders the female space and the male space but does not cross into either position completely. Different variations of gender and gender presentation will be situated closer to one border or the other or may lie precisely in between the two. These variations create this space of borderlands where the subject is never completely

defined. “Anzaldúa’s book *Borderlands* describes a fragmented and multiple subject that strategically deploys the relationship and even the contradictions among its various parts to deconstruct Western narratives of identity based on opposition and hierarchy” (Walker 70). This relationship to various identities can be both empowering and fractional. Throughout this essay, I will investigate the sites of empowerment as well as the consequences of fracturing one’s full authentic self if that self does not fit within defined spaces. I also consider the invisibility that can be created within these borderlands and how this inability to be seen has particularly detrimental effects on the lives of non-binary folx.

Investigating Anzaldúa’s Borderlands

17 Anzaldúa’s concept of borderlands has been used by philosophers in art, identity politics, as well as queer and race theory to investigate numerous sites of divergence since her 1987 book. In “Bodies in the Borderlands: Gloria Anzaldúa and David Wojnarowicz’s *Mobility Machines*,” Todd Ramlow utilizes the concept of borderlands to look at both queer identity and differently abled bodies within the queer community, specifically using the works of artist David Wojnarowicz. Ramlow “consider[s] how these liminal spaces/states might produce a new consciousness that undermines the normative structure and coherence of both sides of the binary” (169). As Ramlow suggests, by existing in a liminal space, a consciousness that is not bounded by conventional binaries can emerge. This consciousness allows the person within the liminal space to see past the binaries and negotiate within the borderlands. Ramlow argues, “Anzaldúa’s tentative assertion of the ‘canceling’ effect of a dually constituted/excluded borderlands subject, or being ‘zero, nothing, no one,’ is rejected throughout the rest of her text, and this dual consciousness precedes her assertion of a more radical multiple subjectivity born out of the borderlands” (176). Anzaldúa argues that it is not a nothingness, but a multiplicity, that is created. This ‘multiple subjectivity’ is what gives the inhabitants the power to look beyond conventional norms, while at the same time encouraging those within the bound spaces to question these norms. Mutability and multiple subjectivities are what give these individuals within liminal spaces the power to critique the lands of distinct genders of which these border dwellers fringe.

18 The power that is given to border dwellers is not an absolute power. There are many struggles that coincide with existing within the borderlands. However, the power that exists

within these areas is a power that is limited to the border dwellers themselves. “Both Anzaldúa and Wojnarowicz create images of life in the borderlands and envision modes of being outside of Self/Other dichotomies. These images have real resistant power, power that is produced along with the exercise of dominant bio-power that would subjugate individuals and groups” (Ramlow 173). The borderlands position the inhabitants in a space of freedom that allows for the questioning of power that does not exist within bordered identities.

19 Within the freedom that exists inside the borderlands, these liminal spaces create an ambiguity that is the source of power while simultaneously being the source of a fracturing of identity.

La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to different thinking characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. The new mestizo copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity... Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Anzaldúa 101)

The border dweller is forced into a continual renegotiation with the borders that surround them. This can lead to a sense of not belonging or not having a home. For instance, a more masculine presenting person may feel the need to dress more androgynously or even feminine when it is necessary to be read as a certain gender, such as going through airport security.

Searching for Home

20 Being positioned in a permanent state of being allows a person to find stability within their identities and existence. Identities that are positioned in the borderlands do not have the stable sense of home due to the liminality of these spaces. These spaces do not allow for permanence as the border dwellers are continually negotiating and repositioning themselves. In “Gendered Borderlands”, Denise Sergura and Patricia Zavella write about this loss of home within the context of moving between geographic spaces.

Subjective transnationalism also reflects the experience of feeling “at home” in more than one geographic location, where identity construction is deterritorialized as part of shifting race-ethnic boundaries or gendered transitions in a globalizing world. Conversely, subjective transnationalism includes feelings that one is neither from “here” nor from “there”, not at home anywhere. (540)

The lack of home referenced by Segura can go beyond geographical location and be applied to locations of gender as well. Many physical spaces are gendered, such as restrooms, dorm rooms, and dressing rooms. Gender itself, though, is also a space. Someone's gender identity takes up space in a room, takes up space in relationships with others, and surrounds someone's identity in relation to others in their life. As non-binary folx enter into different situations with people who have different understandings of the gender binary and those who exist outside of it, they are continually navigating their identities and how they present these identities. Because of this continuous navigating, a permanent space, or home, cannot be realized.

21 The transient nature of living within the borderlands does not allow for one to be situated in permanence. Conversely, those positioned concretely within the borders of male or female are situated in a permanence that they do not have to contemplate. These homes of female and male are already built for them to live within. However, within this continual negotiation, there is an access to knowledge that lies outside of bound spaces. Anzaldúa describes the negotiation between moving in and out of the borderlands and within the borderlands themselves as she gains knowledge. As she navigates within these borderlands, she is able to access "knowing" in different ways that help her to keep moving and keep her from becoming stagnant.

Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesia*, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again. But if I escape conscious awareness, escape "knowing" I won't be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. "Knowing" is painful because after "it" happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before. (Anzaldúa 48)

As Anzaldúa continues to move into new spaces and new consciousness, she is able to increase the amount of "knowing" she is doing. This is another location of power within borderlands where access to knowledge is gained through an access to movement between borders not accessible to those contained within the borders. So, although this liminal space places its inhabitants in a state of "homelessness," it also gives these inhabitants power that is distinctly their own.

22 It is important to note that this search for home can disenfranchise others whose identities are liminal. By placing oneself within a defined recognizable identity, the visibility of undefined identities becomes less prominent. As Jack Halberstam describes in *Female Masculinity*, "But for the queer subject, or what Gloria Anzaldúa calls the border dweller, home is what the person

living in the margins cannot want... the journey home for the transsexual may come at the expense of a recognition that others are permanently dislocated” (171). By finding stability within a recognized identity, transsexuals who clearly define themselves within the binary of male/female further push non-binary folx into the margins. The act of finding a home can, then, displace others into an increased state of homelessness, which could be described as a gentrification of gender. As gender presentations and identities are made more palpable for mainstream consumption, those who cannot exist within palpable presentations are forced further into the margins.

Investigating Spaces for Non-Binary Folx

23 When non-binary folx move throughout their lives, they often present identities that exist beyond the boundaries of recognized gender identities. By blurring these recognized gender identities, these “passengers” fall outside of easily interpellated categories. Turner describes the “passenger,” a person inhabiting the liminal space, as someone who is, “at once no longer classified and not yet classified” (*The Forest of Symbols* 96). This not yet classified space allows an examination of the classifications themselves. However, it also renders the existence of the person that is unclassifiable questionable. As Judith Butler describes, “The fall from established gender boundaries initiates a sense of radical dislocation which can assume a metaphysical significance. If human existence is always gendered existence, then to stray outside established gender is in some sense to put one’s very existence into question” (508). Therefore, while the categories of male and female come under investigation, the person outside of these categories also comes under investigation. The existence of non-binary folx places them within a liminal space that is not yet classified and, at the same time, is “an instant of pure potentiality” (Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* 41). This pure potentiality is the fundamental characteristic that gives these passengers power.

24 Because they are not incased in socially constructed norms of their gender, since their gender exists outside of socially recognized genders, they have the potential to create an identity that is outside of social constructs. This power lies within the potentiality of the liminal space, the access to knowledge in the borderlands, freedom from social constructs, and the multiple subjectivities that exist in the borderlands of the gender dichotomy.

Finding Potential within Non-Binary Folx's Boundaries

25 Knowledge and knowing have been discussed earlier as sites of power. I have investigated Anzaldúa's description of the effect of always moving and having access to the knowing. Now, I would like to look at how this access to knowledge comes at a cost. The act of seeing and being seen is examined by many theories including Althusser's interpellation, Butler's "I", and Foucault's Panopticism. Anzaldúa discusses the power dynamic in "seeing and being seen. Subject and object, I and she. The glance can freeze us in place; it can 'possess' us. It can erect a barrier against the world. But in a glance also lies awareness, knowledge" (Anzaldúa 42). Although the gazer has the power to erect a barrier between what they understand and the gazed upon, this gaze still creates a knowledge for both the gazer and the gazed upon. By existing in a liminal space outside of what is known, the act of existing itself becomes an act of knowing and disseminating knowledge.

26 Within this liminal space, the inhabitants are also afforded freedoms that are not accessible when one is bounded within a defined identity. The barriers are positioned around one's unknown existence, but not within it. Since these inhibitors' identities are not permeated with socially constructed norms that mark these identities as real, they can restructure and negotiate their identities within society. "By separating ritual subjects from existing social structures, the liminal stage of the ritual process endows subjects with the freedom and power to transcend structural constraints and to refashion themselves and society" (Yang 397). This negotiation of self is not one available outside of the liminal space because only the liminal space contains the potentiality to construct one's identity. As discussed prior, Turner's subject is only transitioning when they exist as passenger. Once the subject moves into the ritual subject, they are then repositioned within the structures of society.

27 Non-binary folx, because their existences position them outside of the structures of society, are able to call into question all that is understood as real about gender.

Transgender thus reveals as fraudulent the accepted version of the relations between sex and gender in which sex is thought to be the natural cause of gender. The transgendered subject's role is that of a debunker, unveiling this representation of sex to be just that, a representation or simulation, not the natural cause or ground of gender at all, but its projection. (Prosser 483)

Without their position within the liminal space, their role as debunkers would not be possible. Thus, non-binary folx find power within this liminal space. The power within liminal spaces is

that of the ability to deconstruct accepted social norms as well as to critique the dichotomy of the male/female gender system.

28 As discussed throughout this essay, this power comes with limitations and at a cost to those within these spaces. To have access to the power of liminality, one must stay within the liminal space and not transition into Turner's third state of consummation. This liminal space sometimes renders the subject unintelligible or even invisible. However, positioning oneself outside of the liminal space, by passing over the threshold, crossing the border, and stabilizing their identity, the subject not only loses the power of liminality, but also loses pieces of themselves that initially placed their identity within a liminal space.

Interrogating Impediments in the Borderlands

29 Subjects who exist in the liminal space are threats to the ideas of hegemony and intelligibility. Institutions and other societal systems often requires a person to place themselves into a defined gender to gain access to the resources of these institutions. These systems do not allow for an uncategorized subject. Because of their status of not yet classified, non-binary folx become a problem that society attempts to bind within a space that it can understand and classify. "Liminality is inherently emancipating. The sense of egalitarianism and communion it creates tends to level out existing social structures.... (however) the freedom of liminality, when carried to an extreme, 'may be speedily followed by despotism, overbureacratization, or other modes of structural rigidification' (Turner 1969: 129)" (Yang 384). This need to classify subjects not only places their positions in liminal spaces at risk, but also puts the bodies of these subjects themselves at risk. These bodies are forced to renegotiate their gender presentations, their desire/ability to pass, as well as their gender definitions in order to traverse the society in which they live. They are constantly shifting identities as they negotiate spaces of which they move in and out.

30 The alternative to continual renegotiation is crossing the border into a classified gender. This can be detrimental for many reasons. First, it is often a conscious effort to fit within performed gender roles despite incongruence with the subject's gender identity. Second, it suggests to mainstream society that this is the true lived experience for anyone who's presentation differs from their sex assigned at birth. It has the potential to make others invisible who exist within the liminal space. Even if one does wish to be a border-crosser, Jameson Green

argues, mainstream society will never allow for a seamless transition from liminal space to the state of consummation. “Seeking acceptance within the system of ‘normal’ and denying our transsexual status is an acquiescence to the prevailing binary gender paradigm that will never let us fit in and will never accept us as equal members of society. Our transsexual status will always be used to threaten and shame us” (503). This idea that society has the power to shame a community that is attempting to become part of the mainstream is also problematic when looking at those border dwellers that wish to cross the threshold. If one’s identity does fit closer to the accepted border of man or woman, they are still forced to police their gender identities in order to be seen as legitimate occupiers of this space.

31 Although there are those whose identities fit closer to the gender norms of male or female, by existing in the borderlands as part of their transition, or coming of age journey, they will, as Green suggests, never be entirely integrated into the new bordered identity into which they move. Even those who desire to be intelligible and defined may not meet the criteria to be fully incorporated into the gender binary system. “Interestingly, persons who share liminal states in *communitas* are sometimes there for altogether different reasons. There are those who choose a permanent state of liminality, and others who are liminal by circumstance, condition, or social definition. The liminal persona comes to be in two ways, the voluntary and involuntary” (Carson 10). Even identities that do fit within the gender binary system, if they are not genders that match the sex assigned at birth, many systems still do not allow the same access as they do to cisgender individuals. Thus, the lack of agency in crossing into the mainstream is another reason why it is imperative to create access to institutions without requiring absolute intelligibility.

32 As discussed prior, the liminal space also does not possess a position of wholeness. In fact, often, when society cannot classify an identity, they either cannot consciously conceive of such an identity or simply deny its existence.

Within this schema of a regulatory ideal of naturalized sex and gender, an individual who actively seeks to remain liminal becomes, to a certain degree, invisible... although they are perceived, it is not clear how they are (or, perhaps, should be) perceived – we do not have an easy way of seeing them that does not violate their sense of non-identification with existing gender and sexual norms. (McQueen 7)

As Butler discussed, a person existing outside of the binary gender system may have their very existence questioned because there is no classification that can make their lived experiences intelligible. To be unintelligible is to be invisible.

33 There are multiple theorists whose concepts of identity aid in exploring subjectivities of non-binary folx. First, Althusser's theory of interpellation will be considered. Althusser's theory suggests that if there is no language for which the hailer to call out to the one being hailed, the hailed cannot be called. If one is not something that can be hailed, due to lack of language available, then one lacks subjectivity. Butler also uses Althusser to look at her concept of the 'I' and about being visible. As she describes it, "One 'exists' not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable" (*Excitable Speech* 5). This ability to be recognized is what gives identity to those being hailed and a shared understanding between the one doing the hailing and the one being hailed. Without this understanding, a person is unable to share their identities. The concept of invisibility goes hand in hand with the theory of interpellation. Without being able to be interpellated, one remains invisible in the way that they are not given a subjectivity that fits their own identities.

34 Not only does this unintelligibility place the body in a state of invisibility, but also places barriers between them and institutions that require a person to define themselves within the system of the gender binary. Institutions such as marriage, medical access, education, and state and federal identification documents require participation in the system of the gender binary. These institutions help to perpetuate hegemony within the gender system. All of these impediments can cause non-binary folx to define themselves using the current gender system, at least in some aspects of their lives. This, in turn, takes away some of the power that they gain access to within the liminal space, and assists in making these lived experiences invisible while also placing them in direct opposition to the larger society and institutions. "The dual aspect of liminality as both a desired enduring site of being and a finite process of becoming neatly captures the bind which many trans-individuals appear to be caught in with regards to social and political recognition" (McQueen 7). Without change to the gender system, these borderlands will remain marginalized and the people within them will have less access to necessary institutions. However, if the gender system simply includes more classifications of gender, individuals residing within liminal spaces can potentially be moved into a space that is classified and therefore lose the power that comes from existing within this liminal space.

35 That is the challenge faced when dismantling the gender system and gaining access to institutions and rights without losing access to the liminal space. How can one gain access to systems that only grant admission to those who are clearly defined without moving in to a space

of distinct definability? Should the onus fall on those who hold these unclassified identities to become classifiable or the systems that do not allow for access of authentic humans?

36 Victor Turner's liminal space and Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands give theoretical context to the space in which non-binary folx find themselves negotiating. These spaces are a site for empowerment through potentiality, knowing, freedom, and multiple subjectivities. However, within these borderlands, a potential for invisibility, misrecognition, and lack of access all exist. The navigation between the liminal state of gender nonconformity and a presentation that is intelligible when necessary is critical to the lived experiences of non-binary folx. Through the work of acknowledging the power and vulnerability of liminal spaces and borderlands, it is the hope that this essay initiates a conversation that creates awareness and understanding about these lived experiences while allowing these experiences to exist without classification. Only in the space of liminality can these identities be true to themselves and continue to possess the power afforded to them by existing within these borderlands.

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