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Trans* Vocality: lived experience, singing bodies, and joyful politics

Abstract: In this article, we argue that with critical feminist materialisms, it is possible to develop what we have already learned so far from poststructural gender deconstructivism while also asking what can yet be learned from bodies, experience, and materiality. We continue to reject essentialist understandings of gender but maintain that there is a need to emphasize the material dimension of lived experiences. 'Voice' is 'material relationality' that has not yet received enough attention despite its centrality to political pursuits. In tracing the voice and its relation to materialisms, phenomenology, and poststructuralism, we frame 'vocality' as an embodied and lived phenomenon, developing a theoretical lens for the purpose of investigating the enactment of agency of trans* vocality. This phenomenological, materialist approach turns to the lived experiences of transgender and non-binary singers to both ground theory on gender and understand what is political about trans* vocality in singing. Using material from an ongoing research project, we seek to show how the constitution of singing subjects is political and, additionally, how through singing – a kind of 'sensuous knowledge' – trans* vocal expression can be a joyful resource for politicism and social change.

Keywords: voice, transgender, singing, feminist phenomenology, materiality.

Trans* Vocality: Leibliches Erleben, singende Körper und lustvolle Politiken

Zusammenfassung: Wir argumentieren in diesem Artikel, dass es mit Critical Feminist Materialisms möglich ist, die materielle Dimension geschlechtlicher Existenzweisen in empirische Untersuchungen mit einzubeziehen, ohne in essentialistische Annahmen einer natürlichen Bestimmtheit von Geschlecht zurück zu fallen. Poststrukturalistische Geschlechterforschung soll mit dem Fokus auf leibliches Erleben, Körper und Materialität weiterentwickelt werden. Vor dem Hintergrund von Materialisms, Phänomenologie und Poststrukturalismus verstehen wir Stimme als materielle Relationalität. Als solche hat sie bislang in feministischer Forschung zu wenig Aufmerksamkeit erhalten. ‚Vocality' wird in dieser Perspektive als ein verkörpertes und gelebtes Phänomen verstanden. Wir kombinieren diese drei theoretischen Ansätze, um empirisch untersuchen zu können, wie trans* vocality aktiv gelebt und erlebt wird. Ein besonderer Fokus liegt dabei auf der politischen Dimension von trans* vocality. Hierfür greifen wir auf das empirische Material eines laufenden Forschungsprojektes zurück. In den narrativen Interviews mit transgender und nichtbinären Sänger*innen sowie in teilnehmenden Beobachtungen von Transgender-Chören zeigt sich die politische Dimension der Konstitution von singenden Subjekten und darüber hinaus, wie im Singen Körperwissen und trans*vokale Ausdrucksweisen zur lustvollen Ressource in politischen Kämpfen werden.

Schlagwörter: Stimme, Transgender, Singen, feministische Phänomenologie, Materialität.

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To sing is an expression of your being,
a being which is becoming.
– Maria Callas

Theoretical Frame: Bringing Together Materialisms, Phenomenology, and Poststructuralism to Investigate Trans* Vocality

With critical feminist materialisms, it is possible to develop what we have already learned from poststructural gender deconstructivism while also asking what can yet be learned from bodies, experience, and materiality. 'Voice' is 'material relationality' that has not yet received enough attention despite its centrality to political pursuits. In this paper, we trace the voice and its relation to materialism, phenomenology, and poststructuralism. Framing 'vocality' as an embodied and lived phenomenon, we develop a theoretical lens for the purpose of investigating the enactment of agency of trans* vocality. This phenomenological, materialist approach turns to the lived experiences of transgender and nonbinary singers to ground theory on gender as well as to understand what is political about trans* vocality in singing. Using material from an ongoing research project, we seek to show how the constitution of singing subjects is political and, additionally, how through singing – a kind of 'sensuous knowledge' – trans* vocal expression can be a joyful resource for politicism and social change.

Voice and vocality

We are used to thinking about the concept of 'voice' when it comes to the theorization of subjectivities and politics, epistemological reconstructions of herstories, and language and meaning. Voice becomes more intricate, however, when we tether it back to the embodied speaker or singer interacting with other likewise embodied and situated others. In this paper, we present how materialisms and phenomenology pick up on and account for these aspects of the voice. In approaching 'vocality' as a phenomenon in the Baradian sense, whereby "*phenomena are the ontological inseparability/entanglement of intra-acting 'agencies'*" (Barad 2007: 139, emphasis in original), vocality[1] is the phenomenon that encompasses yet is irreducible to the following (non-exhaustive) intra-acting aspects of the vocal: physical, physiological, biological, representational, constructed, embodied, performative, and lived. It is "through specific intra-actions that phenomena come to matter – in both senses of the word" (ibid.: 140), and our goal in this paper is to outline some of the specificities of how the phenomenon of trans* vocality comes to matter. The lived experience of voice is central to our purposes, because "[v]oice and vocality are not just metaphorical and performative, not only symbols and cultural constructs" (Fisher 2010: 89). Taking up feminist phenomenology, our aim is "to retrieve, and re-emphasize the importance of, the 'phenomenological roots of voice,' in pointing towards a comprehensive experiential account of the imminent [sic], living voice," one that

"explore[s] all facets and features of the phenomena and experience of voice and vocality, from the expressive to the embodied material voice" (ibid.).
Materialisms and phenomenology each offer tools for attending to the materiality of vocality. It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully tease out the points where phenomenology and materialisms diverge, but we do seek to highlight where they might complement each other in order to give a fuller account of what is actively going on in trans* vocality. Additionally, they each offer ways for thinking through what is political about the materiality of trans* vocality.

We tend to agree with Stephanie Clare that

> from an agential realist perspective, politics concerns what becomes materialized, what bodies come to emerge. This understanding of politics is aligned with a form of poststructuralist politics that, rather than seeking to represent subjects, investigates the power relations that constitute the subject, displacing the question of politics from the power relations between subjects to the power relations that go into the subject's constitution (2016: 66).

We acknowledge singing as a physical, physiological process (by and of a subject) that materializes vocal bodies. Trans* singers, then, are engaging with the power involved in determining what bodies emerge. Their vocal bodies are materializing; their embodied voices come to matter and mean something. In conceptualizing vocality as a phenomenon, we can understand *trans** vocality as an example of "dynamic (re)configurings of the world" (Barad 2003: 816) through which the distinction of *trans** vocality from vocality in the general sense gets drawn. There is no ontological trans* voice, but in trans* people enacting singing – and thereby determining the phenomenon of trans* vocality – the trans*ness of the singing comes to matter and trans* singers become subjects. Barad proposes that "[i]t is only through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of 'components' of phenomena become determinate and that particular articulations become meaningful" (2007: 148). When it comes to singing – a human, embodied, lived experience – the specificities and properties of these vocal beings are part of this intra-activity. Given our focus on trans* and non-binary singers, as subjects constituted through singing, and choruses, where singers are coming together in a space in order to make a collective voice matter, we speak of singing trans* vocality as embodied trans* being *in* and *of* the world.

For our empirical interests, we give particular emphasis to the phenomenological take on vocal embodiment, because

> [i]n addition to focusing on the way power constitutes and is reproduced by bodies, phenomenological studies emphasize the active, self-transformative, practical aspects of corporeality as it participates in relationships of power. (Coole/Frost 2010: 19)

The political is to be found not in the bodily material itself, but in its relationship to power, for us here as regards the gender order and the livability of lives.

That a person sings does not automatically mean that this singing is political, but in the sense that singing is gendered and gendering – meaning, related to the gender order – and given that singing is often taken to be a joyful 'auditory event', and thus linked to the possibility for a livable life, it is very plausible that singing by transgender and non-binary people – their materializing as singing bodies, the intersubjective materialization of their voices – is indeed political. Furthermore, learning about trans* singers' sense-making of their experiences of singing using feminist phenomenological methods gives insights into how the embodied, material, intersubjective phenomenon of singing relates to the entanglement of gender order and power; we can learn more about what is political, because "[t]he sense we make out of our sensible, motile, affective relations with the world, others, and ourselves is also political" (Fielding 2017: xvi).

The phenomenon of vocality cannot be reduced to the materiality involved in giving sound to voice, but neither is it possible to consider vocality without this corporeality.[2] Sybille Krämer describes the way bodily materiality is involved in vocalizing – how air from the lungs flows in and

> sets our vocal cords in oscillation, generating sounds through their vibrations. The voice relies on elementary motor activity of the body; there is an underlying interplay between the 'immateriality' of the breath, the resonating cavernous organs, and the flexible resistance of the vocal cords. (Krämer 2003: 67, translated by the authors from German).

In short, "the voice is less an object or state, but rather is motion, is processuality" (ibid., translated by the authors from German). The voice is not an object that is already there; it emerges. And without the self, the person, the body literally breathing life into and sounding this voice, this processuality cannot be properly accounted for. Failing to take the self into consideration, according to Bernhard Waldenfels, "transforms sounds into mere physical acoustic noise [*Schall*]," resulting in the loss of the "auditory event [*Hörereignis*]" (2003: 21, translated by the authors from German). Bodily and physical materiality alone cannot explain the meaning of voicing. In order to sufficiently grasp what the auditory event of singing is and means, we need to acknowledge the specificities going on, intra-acting in the phenomenon vocality, recognizing that they cannot be disentangled from every other specific agential intra-action, and also without setting one as prior to the other. Trans* vocality emerges as a distinctive kind of vocality and trans* singers as subjects, but if it were not for their particular, embodied voices materializing, there would be no phenomenon of which to speak. For us, learning more about their lived experiences of vocalizing, something only they can speak to, is part of trying to account for how voices come to matter.

By addressing the corporeality of the voice and the processual 'doing' and 'being' of singing, a phenomenological, materialist approach towards vocality offers up the chance to learn even more about gender, lifeworlds, power, agency, and transformation.

Trans lived experience and narrative*

Especially for trans* studies, we see it as important to respect and attend to lived experience, centering trans* people's sense-making of their experiences. Henry S. Rubin's argument for phenomenology as a method in trans* studies is that it "works to return agency to us as subjects and to return authority to our narratives. It justifies a turn to the self-reports of transsexual subjects as a place to find counterdiscursive knowledge" (1998: 271). He comments that "[trans] lives have been appropriated to demonstrate the theories of gender performativity, but only to the extent that they fail to reproduce the normative correspondence between body morphology and gender identity assumed as a matter of course by nontranssexuals" (ibid.: 276). Our approaches should not "invalidate the categories through which the subject makes sense of its own experience" (ibid.: 265). Jay Prosser claims that "while theory is grappling with various forms of gendered and sexual transitions, transsexual narratives, stories of bodies in sex transition, have not yet been substantially read" (1998: 4). Another complicating dimension of trans narratives of the body is how trans* people have needed to take up medicalized discourses in order to gain access to gender-affirming procedures, surgeries, and therapies (including voice work). As Shotwell eloquently states:

> this narrative also misses many people's felt sense of inchoate gender expression. And the ease with which these narratives emerge may mask the work it has taken to construct them as ready to hand in narrating always messy lives. Lived gender is often not so simple, nor so binary, as the current gender model claims. (2011: 139)[3]

Narrative, in-depth interviews focused on trans* people's experiences of their lived, singing bodies can help fill the gap Prosser is talking about while also trying to get at the 'work' behind constructing narratives, finding words to represent experiences – especially those that do not yet find representation in normative gender discourses – and learning more about the felt sense of gendered being.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis "shares the view that human beings are sense-making creatures, and therefore the accounts which participants provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience" (Smith et al. 2009: 3). Additionally, the "researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (ibid.). A phenomenological analysis, especially as regards the body and "how it comes to be one's own," according to Gayle Salamon, "can enrich and broaden the mostly gender normative accounts of bodily materiality" so far, including in phenomenology, and "help us understand transgendered bodies as embodying a specificity that is finally not reducible to the material" (2010: 8).[4] This study and this paper on trans* vocality are not about the trans* body as material (self)evidence

of transness. They are, however, about the materiality of the voice, the felt sense of it, and its meaning for trans* existence – about the embodied ways of trans* being in and of the world through singing.

Bodies – matter and discourse

Feminist phenomenology and feminist critical materialisms each seek to elaborate on the social constructivist account of the body, albeit in different ways and to make different points. From the feminist phenomenological perspective, if bodies are understood to be mediated discursively, lived bodily experiences [*leibliche Erfahrungen*] become limited to their discursive representations. Given that bodies always already exist within a societal and gender order, the central question then is how hegemonic knowledge of the body, norms, and discursive conventions take effect in the lived body [*Leib*]. The gender order is so resistant to change exactly because it is materially anchored in bodies. What remains unanswered from this perspective, and what feminist phenomenology seeks to account for, is how bodies themselves are involved in this construction (to this point, see Stoller 2010a).

It is possible to "thematize and theorize lived experience within sociopolitical, discursive, and linguistic operators, without being defined or determined by them" (Fisher 2010: 94). The body is not just passively determined from outside; instead, following Stoller, it can resist such fixation and transcend the construction (2010a: 13). In this way, it is impossible for the body to be completely objectified. Additionally, it is not only bodily impulses that 'fit' to our gendered bodies that are able to be felt; discontent with and discomfort within the gender order are also corporally manifested (Jäger 2014). Our lived experiences are always already richer. Fisher argues that "[p]henomenology can provide the style for an analysis which retrieves and retains the immediate, vibrant, tangible, and compelling lived experience" (2010: 94), and the feminist analysis seeks to center "the multiple aspects, particularities, and dynamics of the social and cultural world," including the plurality and contradiction with which we live and experience our gendered being in the world (ibid.). Thereby, we can try to find out how individuals are able to express all of this which lies outside of the binary order.

The critical feminist materialisms critique of the poststructural social constructivist account is also related to frustration with the idea that matter is mediated by or is a "passive product of discursive practices" (Barad 2007: 151). The force matter itself has as an active factor in the materialization of bodies has been disregarded, they find (see Clare 2016: 66 and Coole/Frost 2010: 19). The constructivist approach has not paid "sufficient attention to the material efficacy of bodies" (Coole/Frost 2010: 19). And these authors "draw attention to a new materialist predilection for a more phenomenological approach to embodiment" (ibid.). Singing is a human embodied, material experience we would like to investigate empirically in a phenomenological, materialist way that understands voices as emergent and meanings of trans* singing as being enacted by matter,

here, especially the material bodies of trans* singers (and of those listening). We want to explore the 'material efficacy' of trans* vocality and what it means politically that these embodied voices are materializing.

In the following, we outline the intersubjective material relationality of vocalizing and listening bodies, discuss the concept of performativity and issues of trans* vocality, and then also refer to the words of trans* singers themselves in order to articulate how singing is political in that voices materialize, come to matter.

Intersubjective Material Relationality: Emergence of Particular Voices

To ask what the voice is leads us to the issue of "the significance of corporeality" (Coole/Frost 2010: 2), which we understand evokes unease, the fear that focusing too much on the body will inevitably lead to re-essentializing understandings of sex and gender.[5] We continue to reject essentialist understandings of gender but maintain that there is a need to give "materiality its dues while recognizing its plural dimensions and its complex, contingent modes of appearing" (ibid.: 27). It is possible to look at the materiality of the voice to tease out how and in what ways it is gendered, involved in processes of gendering, and how it feels and sounds to identify as a certain gender or non-gendered person. To start this exploration into vocality, let us first turn to how the body is involved in processes of vocalizing and listening.

Vocalizing and listening bodies

Earlier in the paper where we differentiated between voice and vocality, we described the corporeality of the voice. While Adriana Cavarero perhaps overstates "the ontological uniqueness" of the lived body and of the voice, her closeness to the corporeality of voice is useful in helping us think through the "material relationality" of the voice in its use (2005: 3, 13). She tells us that "[w]hen the human voice vibrates, there is someone in flesh and bone who emits it" (ibid.: 4). This sonority of "[t]he voice is always *for* the ear, it is always relational" (ibid.: 169, emphasis in original).[6] Hearing, also bodily and material, then:

> has its natural referent in a voice that also comes from internal passageways: the mouth, the throat, the network of the lungs. The play between vocal emission and acoustic perception necessarily involves the internal organs. It implicates a correspondence with the fleshy cavity that alludes to the deep body, the most bodily part of the body. The impalpability of sonorous vibrations, which is as colorless as the air, comes out of a wet mouth and arises from the red of the flesh. (ibid.: 4)

These rich descriptions refer to the meaty physiology of the organs and resonance chambers of the vocal body and the physical material processes beyond our sensory recognition. Cavarero goes deep into the body to try to arouse a

sense of what all is involved in the correspondence between mouth and ear. In this first step towards grasping materiality of the voice, she grounds the more metaphorical concept of 'voice'. By distinguishing between sound and speech, she attends to the "acoustic, empirical, material relationality of singular voices" of the speech act, reclaiming sound untied to semantic meaning from its position as "meaningless" from a logocentrist point of view (ibid.: 13). She also argues that referring to 'voice' (and 'body') in the general sense, as she claims is the case in Roland Barthes' concept of the "grain of the voice"[7] and in most studies on voice, and thus to only regard speech without considering sound and the uniqueness of voice, is to miss an essential step: "Cut off from the throats of those who emit it, speech undergoes a primary devocalization that leaves it with only the depersonalized sound of a voice in general" (Cavarero 2005: 14). The "material relationality" of distinct embodied voices is what makes these distinctions between voices identifiable (ibid.: 13); their uniqueness emerges. Moving away from the idea of 'uniqueness', or as Alexandros Constansis offers: "the auditory idiosyncrasies of these unique vocal personae" (2013: 13), following agential realism, we could also think of embodied distinctions as differences that are emerging. Interpretative phenomenological analysis seeks to offer "detailed, nuanced analyses of *particular* instances of lived experience" (Smith et al. 2009: 37, emphasis in original, see also, Janssen 2017: 34). Voices are inherently such "particular instances"[8] and are therefore good anchoring points for learning about embodied knowledge of trans* experience.

The phenomenological postulate would have it that vocalizing and listening are being in the world. Voices, according to Gernot Böhme (2009: 30) and Rainer Schützeichel (2016: 375) "create atmospheres," and affect is inherent to the voice; there are no affect-neutral voices (Barthes 1991). So, what we are dealing with are voices that are particularly embodied and affective, intersubjectively involved in creating atmospheres, as "voices inhabit an intersubjective acoustic space" (Dunn/Jones 1994: 2). The affective becomes aesthetic, and this sound fills a space. The voice carries affect, is a function of communication (Schützeichel 2016: 381), and the information imparted through this communication is not just that contained in the words. Even before considering the words or semantics carried by the voice, the sounds the voice makes[9] and how these sounds are heard are socially constituted and entail socially coded information about the speaker. And, „we do not just simply hear a body, but instead we hear a certain body, one to which we attribute a gender," among other attributes, „whereby we can certainly be mistaken in our assignments" (Kolesch 2003: 269, translated by the authors from German). The voice constitutes differences and is an indication (not always accurate) of a person's gender (see Schrödl 2012: 24 and Schützeichel 2016: 384).

Voice at another level is also the vehicle for speech, to communicate semantically. It shapes and fills words and sentences and stories. Because we are used to listening with respect to these semantic meanings, we miss hearing the actual voice (Böhme 2009: 30). Nonetheless, referentially, listening is "leibliche Anwesenheit im Raum" (ibid.: 24)[10], and hearing a musical experience, having been invited "to participate in a sense of musical intimacy" (Magowan/Wrazen 2013:

3), results in both a passive and active change in our consciousness as listeners. Singing, then, for both the singer and the listener, is a moment of suspended consciousness in which both are partaking together, imaginatively (Skarda 1989 on Schütz's 1977 phenomenology of music).

Singing bodies

If to speak or to listen is to actively be in and of the world, then perhaps to sing is to give greater resonance to this being.[11] Dunn and Jones call the singing voice a "more emphatically embodied form of vocality than speaking" (1994: 10). Fisher speaks of "the expressive voice of meaning" that the "material voice underlies," giving "the expressive its impetus and power, giving life to the content and meanings," and an example she gives for this is opera (2010: 88). Perhaps singing vocality does have something else to offer. Furthermore, Suzanne Cusick asks whether "because Song is not a compulsory cultural practice" it might be a "hospitable field for 'alternative' performances of one's bodily relationship to culture" (1999: 38)[12], whereby the "vast field of permissible performances might" be liberating, especially as relates to the gender order (ibid.: 42). In any case, differences in uses of the voice should not go overlooked.

Cavarero gives a feminist take on differentiations between "the symbolic patriarchal order that identifies the masculine with reason and the feminine with the body that," from the androcentric tradition, "privileges the semantic with respect to the vocal" (2005: 6). By default then, "feminized from the start, the vocal aspect of speech and, furthermore, of song appear together as antagonistic elements in a rational, masculine sphere that centers itself, instead, on the semantic" (ibid.). Fisher also addresses the "myriad examples of the imagery and associations of voice and vocality with the feminine" (2010: 86) and herself refers to Cavarero's putting it "formulaically: woman sings, man thinks" (2005: 6). These gender metaphors pervasive to musicology spurred feminist musicological criticisms (see Dunn/Jones 1994: 1). Fisher notes that because these were responding to the "symbolic category or construct, a metaphor," they often argued from poststructuralism, thereby missing the "material dimension" at the heart of the metaphor (2010: 87), losing the "living bodily voice" and replacing it with "a constructed and representational voice" (ibid.: 88). Any such critique is therefore discursively limited and fails to attend to the materiality 'behind' the metaphor. What it means for someone to 'have' a certain voice in a certain situation or historical phase depends on hegemonic meanings and terminologies, yes, but at the same time always involves more than that which is given by the social order. In taking this stance, a phenomenological, materialist approach can better attend to the real, embodied, and emerging voice as well as account for agency, both of the singers and of the voicing, because voice and vocality "are not just metaphorical and performative, not only symbols and cultural constructs," but instead "lived experiential phenomena" (ibid.: 89) by gendered beings. Furthermore, "[o]utside of particular agential intra-actions," 'voice' would be "indeterminate" (Barad 2007: 150). Taking into consideration both dimensions

of materiality and the lived bodily experiences of singing and listening, we can critically question and challenge the sociocultural determinism of gender.

In the next section, we delve a bit deeper into what 'performativity' has so far helped us understand about the gender of singing voices and how this relates to our own experiences with our embodied voices.

Gender Performativity in Music

Within the Western musical tradition since the 19th century, vocal categories have been understood in binary gendered terms: sopranos and altos are women's voices, tenors and basses are men's voices (see Grotjahn 2010). There are also "stereotypes of sexual difference" regarding how women's and men's voices sound (Dunn/Jones 1994: 3). As such, how we come to understand and likely experience our singing voices is limited by these discourses, discourses that use biological factors like the size of the larynx and sex hormones to try to claim that these gender differences are natural and matter of fact.

Many musicologists and ethnomusicologists understand the gendered voice to be a social construct, not a natural fact. Cusick writes that "voices stand for the imperatives of sex because, unlike the behaviors we might agree are performances of gender (clothes, gestures, ways of walking), voices originate inside the body's borders and not on the body's surfaces" (1999: 29). Here, Cusick recognizes the corporeality of the body in voice, sees how it is harder to unmask the performativity of gender when it comes to the voice because of its origin in the body, while maintaining that the body does not determine the voice's gender. It is this particular interconnectedness of bodily materiality and gender constructivism at the vocal level that makes it so interesting for studies of gender. The voice is perfectly situated for challenging the assumption that "physical behaviors originating within the body's borders (in the body's cavities) are determined by their site of origin, by the body itself" (ibid.). Barad also reflects on "the seemingly self-evidentiary nature of bodily boundaries," seeing it as "a result of the repetition of (culturally and historically) specific bodily performance" (2007: 155). To Cusick, performativity seems to be a fruitful concept for reflecting on the various ways we can use our voices, as they "are always performances of a relationship negotiated between the individual vocalizer and the vocalizer's culture" (1999: 29). Jenny Schrödl also proposes that a performative approach to voice puts the focus more on the socioculturally contingent production and carrying out of identity, expression, and intersubjectivity through the voice.[13] Singing is a musical performance that is also performative of gender.

Cusick suggests that "by developing a performance-centered rather than listening-centered music criticism," one that takes seriously „the bodily actions that constitute musical performances," we can learn about „the ways musical behaviors and regimes of gender and sexuality interact" (1999: 25).[14] We agree that centering the musical performance and the bodily actions constitutive thereof is fruitful, but would maintain that listening is also materially related to the performance and likewise bodily. While Cusick offers up a critique of

Western musical scholarship for neglecting the performance, Constansis notes that musicological studies of performance that have since been done, even of queer performance, are too centered on the visual aspects, failing to deal with the "auditory" (2013: 13). Yvon Bonenfant also remarks that "[t]he vast majority of scholarship around queer performative embodiment focuses on visually manifested utterances, rather than auditory ones" (2010: 74). The approach we offer here is to investigate gender performativity in singing and to recognize that the primary relation of singing is between the lived vocal and listening bodies (rather than the visual eye). Musical performances are materially related to processes of sensing and perceiving, of the lived body.

At this point, we might take up "an agential realist elaboration of performativity" that "allows matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming, in its ongoing intra-activity" (Barad 2007: 136). Furthermore, "it provides an understanding of *how* discursive practices matter" (ibid., emphasis in original). Studying transgender and non-binary singers' experiences with their voices in body and sound is a way to look at performativity in singing, encompassing discursive practices and materiality, whereby "[d]ifference cannot be taken for granted; it matters – indeed, it is what matters" (ibid.). How does trans* vocality come to differ from vocality in general? Voices do not exist as objects; they emerge in the process of vocalizing. So how is it that trans* voices come to matter? Trans* singers are not just singing in relation to a binary, cis frame for understanding gender of voice; they are enacting their voices from the embodied material that they are. That these voices emerge as trans* voices, this "*determination of* […] *meanings*," according to the agential realist account, is due to "*discursive practices*" that "*are specific material (re)configurings of the world*" (ibid.: 148, emphasis in original). This is not so different from what phenomenologists propose, in the sense that how we experience and describe how we experience our lived bodies is shaped by how our world is configured. In her ethnographic research on music making and choral singing in East Bavaria, Sara R. Walmsley-Pledl found that focusing on the "experiential quality" when talking to research participants about music "revealed how *personal understandings of the body* become linked through the experience of music making to place, people, and gendered events" (2013: 123, emphasis added). And rather than just reproducing normative gender understandings, "[s]ingers' reflections on their musical experiences were also viewed as special and transformative at a level of physical experience that often transcended gender considerations," with such reflections suggesting that "emotions generated in music making can propel individuals to move beyond normative gender and social restrictions, facilitating a sense of transcendence and personal transformation" (ibid.). Whether this is to be marked as transcendence or as enactment of "*specific exclusionary boundaries*" by "*specific agential practices/intra-actions/performances*" (Barad 2003: 816, emphasis in original) is a theoretical/methodological contention that is not necessary to resolve if our goal is to attend to the material and political when it comes to gender and vocality.

Trans vocality and experiential voice work*

Normative gender prescriptions of voice, while unnecessarily restrictive for even cisgender singers, may themselves operate as mechanisms for silencing transgender and non-binary singers. As mentioned earlier, the voice is 'material relationality'. To make a sound that falls upon ears shaped by norms that fail to register this sound as legitimate can render this expression illegitimate. Even our own ears place such strict judgement on our own sounds. Trans* vocality is diverse in manifestation. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs), voice practitioners, and voice teachers and coaches work on the materiality of the voice with their clients. Just to name a few things, the professionals can tell us about physics and physiology of voice production (Titze 1994), measure pitch frequencies and volume, vocal cord lengths and thickness, and track effects of hormone therapies on the speaking and singing voice (Adler et al. 2012). What they cannot measure or determine except by eliciting those responses from their clients, however, is how these are experienced by the singer and what these experiences mean for the singer. While the physiological structures around voice production certainly affects what one can do with their voice, singing or learning to train the voice involves much more than the voice as an ontological given.

To modify sound one cannot, for example, look at or touch the voice, but must instead rely on other feedback and impulses for directing the process. Vocal technique, then, even when founded in the physics of sound production, relies heavily on metaphor and imagery to guide the singer in modifying their (especially interior) body. Voice coaches work on awakening awareness in their clients of the feelings of the voice in the body and on helping clients develop new areas of resonance that they can feel and hear in the body.[15] A question that is therefore asked many times in the course of any given voice lesson is, "How did that feel?" Learning about singing requires knowledge of the somatic experience. The singer is brought to this self-exploration and comes into contact with their embodied knowledge. For Dunn and Jones, "embodiment" is the "material link between 'inside' and 'outside,' self and other" (1994: 2). Voices are situated at this exciting 'border' between interiority and exteriority, and we argue that attending to such experiential knowledge of this embodiment is a way to "begin to delimit the contours of this body whose felt sense is usually unquestioned" (Salamon 2010: 13). As such, studying them can assist us in learning more about how the embodied vocal knower is intra-acting in the materializing of their gendered voice while also picking up on how the experiences are socially shaped, formed, and understood.

Some transgender singing clients may wish to take up voice work as a practice of gender-affirmation, to develop a voice that is congruent with their identified gender. Other singers may avoid such measures, like, for example, transmasculine singers who forego testosterone treatment because, although the treatment might otherwise have a lot to provide them in terms of their transition, they do not want to lose a singing voice that they already like, have success with, and feel is their own. Some transgender singers report gender dysphoria[16] in their singing experiences, and, as a diagnostic word, dysphoria is a part of trans*

people's work with other kinds of professionals, like psychiatrists, counselors, and health insurance companies. Some trans* singers might perceive themselves as having a certain voice type, while their range, tessitura, sound, and other factors clearly indicate another (gendered) voice type. Some may also just find it distressing that the sound their voice produces does not fit the parameters of their identified gender – like, for example, a transgender woman with the voice type tenor or bass. It is vital that voice professionals become aware of these various intersectional experiences, wishes, and needs of their transgender and non-binary clients. 'Passing' may be, but not always necessarily is, the ultimate goal.[17] Indeed, some singers may even desire to have a vocal aesthetic that can be 'read' as trans*.

The Political Dimension of Trans* Vocality: Joyful Being

Literature from musicology and speech-language pathology still has a tendency to consider transgender vocality in terms of 'passing', or of 'dysphoria', or wrong body/wrong *voice* narrative. Firsthand accounts from transgender and non-binary singers and their experiences in trans* choruses are effective in contextualizing the diverse experiences, difficulties, and successes, as well as the needs, wishes, and potential of transgender and gender non-binary singing.

Trans gendered being and voice*

When asked to describe trans* vocal experiences, one preliminary observation from our on-going research project, trans* singers and their voice practitioners often take up or speak in relation to discourses of dysphoria. Some trans* voice clients are afraid of slipping back into their pre-transition voice, which can trigger dysphoria. When it comes to trans* vocality, we would argue that the conditions that could cause us to think of 'right voice' and 'wrong voice' say more about the "social world than with any individuated experience of our bodies" (Shotwell 2011: 130). Others who report having had a rather positive relation to their pre-transition voice and whose transition impacts the voice may (initially) mourn their pre-transition voice and experience this as a loss. Other gender dysphoric experiences (like dysphoria about the chest) may also affect a person's level of comfort in singing, given that vocality is embodied and material (i.e., will involve the chest). Many singers, however, especially after taking up voice work or joining a trans* (or trans*-inclusive) chorus, report being able to overcome such dysphoric or otherwise uncomfortable vocal experiences. One singer encouraged other trans* people to sing and to "let go of expectation" of their voices, understanding this expectation as the condition for how the "voice is denied the space to be itself," emphasizing that, instead, "it's about creating the frame that holds us." Her suggestion is that trans* singers no longer preoccupy themselves with the question of gender intelligibility but instead rather actively engage in creating the matter that is what they already are, vocal beings

– reflecting an agential realist approach. Another transfeminine singer reports: "it's not important that I sound particularly feminine; it's important that I sound good," and "it doesn't matter what your range is, just enjoy it […], be who you are […] a song is a song. […] You're ok the way you are, you're just fine – there's such a broad spectrum [of gender expression in voice]."

Music making, according to Magowan and Wrazen, is "not just about being male or female but it is also about becoming men or women and understanding their spheres of participation and senses of belonging in the world" (2013: 2). Such a statement picks up on the processual, becoming of gender in lived experiences of music making as a social practice, but it also falls back on binary logic, and "[l]ived gender is often not so simple" (Shotwell 2011: 139). Turning to experiences of lived trans* vocality and the narration thereof by trans* singers can tease at and fray the knots of dominating, binary, cis-normative narratives of gender. And learning about their investment in making their voices matter, their intra-action in the material-discursive practice of trans* vocalizing, can help us learn about what is political about the materialization of trans* vocality.

To sing is to defy these hegemonic discourses about trans* bodies that mean to and yet fail to represent the trans* experience (as if it were even possible to speak of such in the singular). Ignoring (or in spite of) discursive gender intelligibility, a trans* woman can feel powerful in her femininity while singing in the lowest pitches in the room, for example. A doing of being okay in the body, of feeling powerful instead of dysphoric through singing is the discursive practice. It is about being able to be in a situation in which there is space for the voice *to be*. Trans* choruses open "a space for feeling differently" (Shotwell 2011: 146) in which trans* and non-binary singers can experience "transformations in sensuous understanding" that "involve a shift in how we identify and follow longings" (ibid.). Bonenfant "maintains that queer vocal doings and queered auditory sensations are important to the understanding of the political dynamics of timbral exchange" (2010: 74). He suggests that, "[t]he permission to create sensation in the social sphere, and thus fully manifest one's sensorial existence amongst that of others, might depend on our ability fully and sensually to sound and seek sound" (ibid.). Musicologists have seen this in musical performance, calling it "self-authorization" (Dunn/Jones 1994: 10), whereby "the singing voice redefines the issue of authority. No longer is the 'grain' or body-in-the-voice a social or aesthetic liability; instead it is a source of power" (ibid.). Interestingly, the first singer quoted above still speaks of framing. It is, however, not a frame for intelligibility, but rather a frame that "holds." The frame that holds is the one that fits because it materializes with the vocal, lived body in singing; it takes shape in the situation. The meaning of their singing is not predetermined, "is not a property of individual words or groups of words but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential dance of intelligibility and unintelligibility" (Barad 2007: 149).

Our phenomenological, materialist view finds the political there in the materializing of such vocal bodies in vocality. We need to pay better attention to the "relationality already put in action by the simple reciprocal communication of voices" (Cavarero 2005: 16), because using our voices is already political in how

they "above all make heard a mutual dependence" (ibid.: 200). For Cavarero, the voice is "a deep vitality of the unique being who takes pleasure in revealing herself through the emission of the voice. This revelation proceeds, precisely, from inside to outside, pushing itself in the air, with concentric circles, toward another's ear" (ibid.: 4). As the sound is literally vibrating in their bodies, the 'grain' of the singers' voices reaching their ears, something is carrying forward in this intersubjective moment. Fisher postulates that "[i]f the material body is our relation to and basis in the world, the voice is our opening and access; an equally fundamental material link" (2010: 94). For her, the voice plays a special and vital role in how our bodies relate to one another, stating further that "[w]ithout the body there may not be a material voice; but without the voice there are merely mute, and arguably self-enclosed corporealities" (ibid.). She suggests that "the voice is not only the crucial material link for me and the world, but also enables the transition from co-corporeality to intercorporeality" (ibid). It is not just that subjectivities have been formed, with their singing being "merely an end product," which would be "to cheat matter out of the fullness of its capacity" (Barad 2007: 66). Instead, trans* vocalic intra-actions are causal, and trans* vocality comes into matter as an "active factor in further materializations" (ibid.). Singers make vocal sounds and "create a field of vibrations. We shake matter. We make matter buzz with the kind of ripple effect wave energy that we call sound. From our bodies, these waves move forth and journey through space and time. They act on, and interact with, matter" (Bonenfant 2010: 75). Singers' bodies are intra-acting with one another and also with those of the listeners. There is something that is carried forward. This something is irreducible to any single factor or cluster of factors involved in the phenomenon, but is certainly tied up with our understandings and experiences of gendered being in the world. With a "phenomenology of the embodied voice and vocality," Fisher argues, we "can then begin to listen to both the embodied voice and the voiced and voicing body, as the locus and promise of genuine connection, dialogue, and exchange" (2010: 94). We share her optimism in the fruitfulness of studying the voice in such a way.

Joyful politics and sensuous knowledge

This exchange that occurs in vocality, as outlined earlier in the paper, is inherently affective. This affect evokes emotions in us. Music making is an emotional engagement, and by singing, "performers evoke different kinds of emotional bonds among themselves and with their audiences, creating varied senses of interdependency, intimacy, and reciprocity" (Magowan/Wrazen 2013: 2). One transgender woman said about her experience with a transgender chorus that:

> For me to be able to get together with other trans people – we found a reason to be ourselves and find our voices by focusing on the chorus. We were in joy! The only time I'd gotten together with trans people before then was to organize to protest legislation or to honor our dead.

Again, the choice of words is telling. Singing with the choir first brought trans* people together and gave reason "to be" and to bring voices into being, thus allowing the voices to become and be found. Their singing together had a different effect than coming together to form a political collective voice or to honor the voices permanently silenced. It was not just that the singers were joyful for having sung; singing was affectively joyful and constitutive of their being, of their existence. To experience joy through singing, inextricably embodied, is to be bodily involved in joy. Ethnomusicological studies show how "singing can thus offer an emotional catharsis that also transforms the singer into an active agent through the possibility of reimagining current realities" (Magowan/Wrazen 2013: 3). It is about empowerment, and as Walmsley-Pledl states, "[s]inging begins unequivocally with the body" (2013: 114).

Singing is a "sensuous experience" (ibid.). Singers' bodies are the instruments producing sound "while at the same time being immersed in sound. The body feels sound from both within and without (…) creating a sensuous, somatic experience" (ibid.: 115). Trans* singers and choruses already have implicit knowledge of the politicism of their singing. Their joy is a confirmation of their living and existing, an audible and non-conforming persistence. In social worlds in which being trans can mean living a precarious life, one that is not meant to be seen and heard, there is something Shotwell calls a "sensuous problem: living well involves a socially contingent comfort in one's body" (2011: 135). Compared to cisgender people, trans* people suffer from disproportionately higher rates of being murdered, being disowned by their families, experiencing homelessness, discrimination, denial of healthcare, and mental health and substance abuse problems, and just under half of the population of trans* people attempt suicide (Haas et al. 2014). As Shotwell puts it, "many trans lives could be more easily livable" (2011: 135). To have a joyful somatic experience in singing is to counter the "sensuous problem" around livability. Refusing to accept a continuation of this situation, one artistic director of a trans* chorus, herself trans, demands: "It's time for our voices to be heard." Regardless of the discursive frames of gender intelligibility, trans* people's singing is a material-discursive practice that engages with norms regulating gender intelligibilitiy – even in spite of them – to interrupt the exclusion of their voices from the auditory realm. The effectiveness of the materialization has to do with the embodiment of voice and its inherent material relationality: "the power and immediacy of the material, corporeal voice are undeniable" (Fisher 2010: 90).[18] In their singing performances, "[t]he physical voice confers a vitality and tangibility on these representations, emphasizing in turn the centrality and inescapability of the corporeal" (ibid.).

Recalling the varying experiences of transgender and non-binary singing and thinking again about the question of the legitimacy of these uses of voice, we can think of this singing as a catalyst for social movement, because "sensuous knowledge shows up as the motor, impetus, or reason for social movement" (Shotwell 2011: 127; see also Jäger 2014). Their experience of joy in singing is material, embodied, meaningful, and a "resource for social change" (Shotwell 2011: 147). Ethnomusicologists speak of how "[s]ingers invite listeners to participate in a sense of musical intimacy through the affective power of songs, lyrics

and meanings," enabling audiences "to relate to the sentiments and politics of belonging to a place" (Magowan/Wrazen 2013: 3). Singers are emerging in their personal, individual endeavors of singing, and the relationality of singing means that others are being affected, too. This affective intersubjectivity is political. When trans* choruses sing, there is a collective vocal body, 'one voice' from which they are singing and in intersubjectivity with the audience, in relation. Trans* singing is a testament to vulnerability, and their demand to be seen and be heard as singing subjects, to be materially related, is already saying something by reaching the ear of the listener – is already mattering. It is an affirmation of materiality,

> or, to be less abstract, to insist on the livability of one's own embodiment, particularly when that embodiment is culturally abject or socially despised – is to undertake a constant and always incomplete labor to reconfigure more than just the materiality of our own bodies. It is to strive to create and transform the lived meanings of those materialities (Salamon 2010: 42).

While transgender choruses do not proclaim to be social movements, their desired reach can go beyond just having a space for themselves in which to sing freely. The mission of the Trans Chorus of Los Angeles (TCLA), for example, is "to fiercely empower the transgender, non-binary and intersex community to discover, love, develop, and use their voices to change the social ecology everywhere."[19] This empowerment is reflected in the words of one singer in a trans* chorus who reports that they are reclaiming the joyfulness of singing, learning to love their voices, and following the message of: "if somebody doesn't like how you sound, that's their problem, not your problem." In relation to social movements and change, it is important to look into the instances where future sanctioned acts or practices are being done while they are not yet permitted. It is this doing before being permitted to do so that is at the heart of the politics and subversion of the deconstructivist mindset, but more than the discursive act or radical vulnerability being the outset for the politicism, it is rather the effect of their joy in a lived experience. There is reason for this action, and it can come from "conceptual understandings, our emotional frameworks, [and] our bodily experience" (Shotwell 2011: 150). It is through their articulation of this experience that we come to know how it is meaningful *for them* in political ways. In their singing, the choruses are holding up their listeners to new standards, new expectations – their own joy as the new parameters. In this way, they are changing the ecology.

Trans* singers enter "as subjects intra-actively co-constituted through the material-discursive practices that they engage in" (Barad 2007: 168), here, singing. They enact trans* vocality and emerge as subjects, as trans* singers taking up "a responsibility to intervene in the world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering" (Barad 2013: 827). This is engagement with power dynamics, and by turning to the subjects emerging when agency is enacted in embodied practices, like singing, we can learn about what is political – about their lived experiences and their involvement as "part of the

world-body space in its dynamic structuration" (Barad 2007: 185). While it may not be possible to reconcile the fundamental differences between materialist and phenomenological thinking, we must not throw out one for the other just because they diverge. We hope to have offered a way of thinking them together in order to locate the political when it comes to the materiality of vocality.

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Remarks

1 The term 'vocality' has been used by other authors in different ways. For example, for Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (1994) "to move from 'voice' to 'vocality,' then, implies a shift from a concern with the phenomenological roots of voice to a conception of vocality as a cultural construct," and they use the term "in order to stress that voices inhabit an intersubjective acoustic space" (2). Linda Fisher argues that distinguishing between 'voice' and 'vocality' to put a focus on the performative element has resulted in the loss of the "living bodily voice" (2010: 88) conceptually. Fisher's phenomenological take on voice and vocality does not "dispute that the voice, like the body generally, is culturally, discursively, and politically mediated and produced", but she "want[s] to emphasize the material irreducibility of lived embodiment, the phenomenal, carnal materiality and physicality that is experienced immanently and viscerally" (88). Vocality, in our use, like Fisher, picks up on the processual while not dismissing corporeality.
Alexandros N. Constansis (2013) introduces the terms "transvocality," "cisgender vocality," "hybrid vocality," and "non-binarian vocality" in his musicological case study on the Female-to-Male (FTM) singing voice. Drawing from gender and queer theory, in a footnote he explicates that "unlike other musicological definitions, the terms 'hybrid vocality' and 'hybrid vocal personae' tend to focus on the effects of non-binarian, i.e., non-strictly 'male' or 'female', endocrinological and gender formation in singing vocality" (Constansis 2013: 22).

2 Fisher reminds us that "[f]rom a phenomenological point of view, the material is what is always already there, perhaps concealed or forgotten, but always present and dynamic" (2010: 94).

3 The term 'felt sense' was first introduced by Eugene Gendlin to describe "the layer of the unconscious that is likely to come up next. This is at first sensed somatically, not yet known or opened, not yet in the 'preconscious'" in Gendlin (1996:19). Jäger and König (2017) draw upon Gendlin's concept of felt sense in designing experiential interviews for gender research. Observing at this level offers up the chance to bring into view contradictions, breaks and changes within the gender order, to discover something new.

4 "The body is, instead, 'a nexus of living meanings,' gaining these meanings through proprioception, the primary but unlocatable 'felt sense' that allows a body to be experienced as a coherent whole rather than a collection of disparate parts. The implications of these ideas for thinking transgenderism are quite promising, and several trans writers have described this disarticulation between felt and observed gender in language that is deeply resonant with phenomenological accounts of embodiment" (Salamon 2010: 4).
In his book "Phenomenal Gender: What Transgender Experience Discloses," Ephraim Das Janssen makes the case that "a Heideggerian, applied phenomenological account of gender focuses attention where it is needed: lived experience […] to get at the heart of what gender is for *all* by examining those for whom gender just does not work out according to expectations" (2017: 5, emphasis in original).

5 For more detail on feminist views towards and dealings with matter, see Pitts-Taylor (2016), and for a discussion of how materiality has been treated especially in work in transgender studies, see Salamon (2010).

6 See Schrödl (2012) for a thorough survey of phenomenological understandings of 'hearing', including references to Senf's (1989) take on how the moment of distance falls away in listening and Serres' (1998) claim that it is not just the ear that perceives; the whole body does.

7 For Barthes, the 'grain' "is the body in the singing voice" (1991: 276), although Cavarero criticizes how "[h]is attention, in short, falls on the oral cavity," and "the grain of the voice has to do above all with the way in which the voice, through the pleasure of sonorous emission, works in language" (2005: 15).

8 Bonenfant attributes "what makes sounds distinguishable from one another" to 'timbre', noting as well how difficult it is to describe timbre, "for our *lived* experience of it tends to be extraordinarily complex" (2010: 75, emphasis in original).

9 Doris Kolesch points out how when we listen to the voice, we also hear breath, the smacking and movement of lips, tongue, and gums. We hear when the voice starts and stops and attend to the silence in between (2003: 269, translated and paraphrased by the authors). Cf. Barthes (1991: 271-272).

10 "bodily [leibliche] presence in space" (Böhme 2009: 24, translated by the authors).

11 See Schrödl (2012: 41-42), who voices skepticism of the claim that the singing voice has a greater material dimension than the speaking voice. While a measurement for comparison certainly cannot be made, it is still useful to consider the ways in which speaking and singing vocality differ.

12 We might counter this question by noting that there are situations in which singing is a compulsory cultural practice, for example, at school, in church, at sporting events, etc., and these experiences might be oppressive rather than liberating.

13 "Instead of focusing on traditional concepts of vocal expression of a supposed given, unchanging subjectivity, interiority, and linguisticality [Sprachlichkeit], the performative perspective rather fo-

cuses on the always also socio-culturally contingent process of production and carrying-out of identity, linguisticality [Sprachlichkeit], and intersubjectivity through the voice" (Schrödl 2012: 27, translated by the authors).

14 For more on the potential of performance studies, see Doğantan-Dack, Mine (ed.) (2016).

15 We are grateful to Diane Robinson for this and many other insights about voice work, especially with trans* clients.

16 The following definition for "Gender Dysphoria" (GD) is listed in the glossary of the book "Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community" (2014): "A mental health diagnosis that is defined as a 'marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender.' Replaces *gender identity disorder* in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition (DSM-5)*" (614). Additionally, "[g]ender dysphoria can be defined as having unhappy feelings about the sex we were assigned at birth or the gender roles that come with that" (ibid.: 307).

17 Initial interviews, conversations with professionals, and conference attendance have informed these preliminary observations. Professionals should be aware not only of the various experiences, wishes, and needs of their transgender clients, as mentioned above, but also of intersectional gender and queer theory. Transgender and gender non-binary people should not bear the sole responsibility for understanding completely and informing others about being transgender. In their positions, voice professionals could (with care, respect, and following codes of ethics) play important roles in intervening in moments where gender norms and experiences come together – where vocal experiences can be framed as gender-affirming and/or degendered, non-essentialized, and altogether in non-judgmental terms. The first books on transgender voice work from the fields of vocology and music pedagogy have been published, with updated editions on the way (see Adler et al. 2012; Jackson Jackson Hearns/Kremer 2018; and Mills/Stonehan 2017), and these would benefit from a greater incorporation of insights from critical social science perspectives, trans*gender studies.

18 Here Fisher is considering the material operatic voices of women when reading them with poststructural, feminist musicological criticisms of the roles of women in opera, their characters and often sexist gender codings. Fisher maintains that in spite of this rather "inferior" positioning of women in opera, "their voicing – that they voice and the expressive power of that voicing – represents a considerable subversive political potential" (2010: 90).

19 From the TCLA website: <http://transchorusla.org/#tclamission.> (accessed July 23, 2017).

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