

plain also something EA has become famous for: recommending many people to take high-earning jobs in business or finance and give away much of their earnings to charity. The consequences of the career-consequentialism of EA are more startlingly visible still at a revealing moment in Singer's book when he writes that 'on a plausible reading of the relevant facts, at least some of the guards at Auschwitz were not acting wrongly', for nastier people still would have taken their places, if they hadn't nobly stepped forward to kill Jews 'humanely'. We see at a moment like this the depths to which the logic of the lesser evil – the logic of consequentialism, the logic of EA – will take one. It seems a long journey from the utopian aspirations of EA to an apologia for serving as a Nazi guard at Auschwitz. But, for one who accepts the logic of EA, it is apparently no distance at all.

It is admirable to be willing to break social norms to improve the lot of other beings, and encouraging that significant numbers of people are willing to give selflessly and systematically to others far away, and that they care enough to work to check that their money is used effectively. And for comparing the effectiveness of a few commensurable charities, EA is, as I have said, of use. Yet there needs to be far more thinking here on the relationship between effective altruism and effective *democracy*. Rich people can choose what they give to. Bill and Melinda Gates are not technology-neutral: their charitable work focuses on techno-fixes and ignores anthropogenic climate change. Indeed, its only major climate-change dimension, worryingly, is Gates's interest in buying up geo-engineering patents. I am not encouraged by MacAskill's warm words for those looking into this. At the very least, it is alarming that MacAskill seems almost to pass over what is by far the most vital element of the climate issue – namely, cutting down on our GHG-pollution of the atmosphere – in favour of carbon offsets on the one hand and reckless technophilic enthusiasm for geo-engineering on the other. Doing good better? I think that philosophy can help us do much better than this.

Rupert Read

Gender without identities

Judith Roof, *What Gender Is, What Gender Does* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016). 280 pp., £78.00 hb., £21.99 pb., 978 0 81669 857 8 hb., 978 0 81669 858 5 pb.

In queer theorist Annamarie Jagose's book, *Orgasmology* (2012), she argues that orgasm has been an overlooked aspect of queer critique. Part of a larger recent interrogation of queer theory's relationship to normativity, Jagose suggests that orgasm, often a seemingly normative aim of sex, has, for the most part, escaped the purview of queer thought. In turning to orgasm, Jagose also attempts to turn queerly to the stuff of sex without turning it into metaphors for queer kinship or sociality. Sticking with the material and literal orgasm, Jagose, in a challenging methodological move, insists that sexuality studies has difficulty thinking about sex outside of identity. There is a similar challenge in Judith Roof's recent rethinking of gender. In *What Gender Is, What Gender Does*, Roof suggests that gender is too tightly bound to identity – it is too often imagined as something that one can fashion, claim, or 'be'. She asks instead after what gender might be without subjectivity, offering readings of popular culture (television, film, celebrity) that decentre gender as a process of subjectification. She reads gender not through subjectivity but through a variety of other concepts, including the taxonomical, the ethical, the narratological, the temporal and the non-human. In this way, Roof aims to rearticulate gender away from 'masculinity and femininity', insisting on the non-binary, processual nature of gender. Genderings, for Roof, are 'infinite and perpetually changing'; not tied to 'any original theme or desire in subjects', nor in any way stable.

When Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* in 1990, it was, as goes without saying, a game changer. It both challenged the foundations of a feminism that seemingly required 'woman' as its political referent and helped to inaugurate the field of queer theory. In

Butler's conception, gender is a stylised repetition of acts, acts which both give the illusion of an internal truth and produce the subject as legible. Butler's thinking intervened in theories of subjectivity by insisting that the subject comes into being through gender, even as she suggested that there is no subject that 'does' gender; the doing is what produces the subject. It remains by far the most influential and most often cited text when it comes to theorising gender. Moreover, its ideas have crossed over from the academy into a more popular vernacular – most recently, Sasha Velour, the Season Nine winner of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, quoted Butler's ideas on the show. The degree to which Butler's theory of performativity has dominated the field of gender studies could hardly be overstated.

It is precisely in opposition to this dominance that Roof positions her work. As she asks in her introduction, what happens when performativity has become not 'a' way to think about gender, but 'the' way? In this, Roof seems less concerned with Butler's concept of gender performativity itself and more with its legacies, or with the various ways that her complex theory has been translated and taken up by others (particularly, it seems, non-academics). Part of Roof's concern is about the way in which performativity seems to bestow agency upon subjects – the crude interpretation of Butler that imagines gender's performativity means anyone can choose their gender at will. This, of course, has been something that Butler has, again and again, clarified, most notably in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993). However, Roof suggests that performativity has so attached us to gender as an identity that we cannot see the way it exceeds this logic of 'being' or 'having'. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as Lacanian psychoanalysis, Roof suggests that a more systems-inspired model better gets at what gender is, or, better gets at gender outside of identity. She suggests that gender is a 'machinic process that perpetually reorganizes multiple sets of regimes and operations that link the psychic and the social.' Along with her suggestion that the legacies of performativity have resulted in gender being anchored to identity, her more machinic account of gender is meant to counter what she reads as

performativity's production of gender as binary. For Roof, the conceptual problem with performativity is that it appears to be secondary to a subject's 'primary sexualisation'; it is locked then within binary categories, even if these categories appear to be 'wieldable'. For Roof, Butler's theory of performativity too heavily tethers gender to binary sex, even as she aims to separate them as critical objects; gender remains, in some sense, 'masculinity and femininity', even as it becomes loosened from 'men and women'.

What feels unsatisfying in *What Gender Is, What Gender Does* is the way genders become at times untethered in Roof's work – a crude reading would summarise the book by saying that Roof multiplies the meaning of gender without an anchor or any political stakes. The bold warning at the end of the book's introduction seems to bear signs of this anxiety: 'MOST IMPORTANT, THIS IS NOT SIMPLY AN EXTENDED LIST OF CATEGORIES, NOR IS IT AN EXPANDED TAXONOMY.' Yet, Roof's theorisation lacks the anchor that heteronormativity provides for Butler's theories of performativity. In my understanding of Butler, heteronormativity is central to her analysis of gender – this is partly why her theory has been so influential for queer thinking. Her analysis is careful to connect gender with desire and sexuality, where heteronormativity is the driving factor behind the cultural demands for binary gender identity. For Butler, this is what gender does: binary gender produces the seeming naturalness and inevitability of heterosexuality (or, heteronormativity requires the production of binary gender). It is also this point that both makes genders something other than free-floating possibilities and connects gender to subjectification, producing heterosexual identity as the only recognisable subjectivity. In Roof's insistence that gender is neither identity nor binary, what is lost is the critique of heteronormativity that has been so generative from Butler's account. What do we get instead? In some sense, what we get is a thorough account of gender as non-binary. In this, Roof's repeated insistence that gender is a machinic process that is neither binary nor essential seems to come out of, and sit within, a contemporary mainstreaming of non-binary identity. As 'man' and 'woman' are increasingly displaced, rejected and forced

open by queer, intersex and trans activists and theorists alike, it is as crucial a moment as any to keep thinking through what gender might be outside of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Indeed, as I write this, the singer/songwriter Pink has just given a speech at the MTV Music Awards in defence of her child's non-normative gender expression, which is being praised on multiple internet news outlets as a rallying cry for non-binary gender. 2017 also saw MTV rename its iconic 'Moonman' trophy the 'Moon Person' award, as well as erase all gender-specific awards categories in both its Music Awards and its Movie & TV Awards. Yet, these are not the discourses that Roof's work contributes to, precisely because she wants to wrest genders away from identity.

It becomes clear that the real target of Roof's work is not Butler, but those (mostly unnamed) others that are responsible for the legacies of Butler's work; those who insist on gender as an identity, particularly those, it seems, who are claiming identities outside of the binary. While there are, I think, good reasons to be sceptical of a neoliberal mode of subjectivity that privileges an 'I' that is seemingly 'free' to make itself (where this is always an imperative framed as a choice) – and Roof offers some insightful analyses of makeover paradigms in this regard – there is a deeply difficult refusal in Roof's work to engage with any of the seeming targets of her critique (those contemporary activists and theorists who are opening up binary gender identity). In a book that advocates gender as nonessential and non-binary, many will be surprised to find that Roof does not engage in any sustained way with trans theories or theorists. Instead, activist Riki Wilchins, author of *GenderQueer*, is made to stand in for all 'gender activists' and Jan Morris' now dated autobiography, *Conundrum* (1974), is made to speak to all trans people's experiences of gender. Had she engaged with any trans theorists, for instance, she might find that many of them are also deeply suspicious of a neoliberal model of subjectivity.

The particular violence of Roof's refusal to engage becomes most marked, however, in the concluding castigation of 'younger "queer" advocates' who, she charges, are misguided in their play with gender, attempting to 'shock ingrained structures out of ex-

istence by simply appearing to fly in the face of the surface signifiers by which they believe such structures persist.' Here, finally, are the stakes for Roof: 'Gender is a lure', a lure away from the problem of sexual difference. Playing around with signifiers and multiplying gender identities is imagined as a kind of distraction from the real and more difficult problem of sexual difference, which, for Roof, seems to name the real problems of asymmetries of power that 'continues no matter how liberated, proliferative, or varietal we might be about either gender or identity'. If sex becomes gender – as in Butler's suggestion that we take gender as a sign of sex, when in actuality sex is always-already gender (all there is is gender) – then 'play' with gender seems to destabilise the binary logic of sexual difference. Roof's project is to separate once and for all genders from sex. As Roof would have it, 'young "queers"' today are distracted with gender, thinking they are doing the work of dismantling sexual difference, when really they are playing with signs, subscribing to 'a fantasy of whisking away the symptoms of the binaries of which they seem oddly unaware.' Here though, we must take Roof at her word that 'they' are 'oddly unaware' – as nowhere do 'they' appear. Helpfully though, Roof lists all the things that 'they' don't know: anything of patriarchy, anything of capitalism or anything of politics (specifically the Fourteenth Amendment of the US constitution). It becomes difficult, in the end, to salvage the more convincing aspects of Roof's arguments, entrenched as they become in a generational admonition of what she sees as the failures of a younger, contemporary gender activism and queer politics; a politics caricatured but never engaged in dialogue.

Robyn Wiegman writes in *Object Lessons* of the desires attached to 'gender' as a critical object, tracing in particular the way in which 'gender' has supplanted 'woman' in university departments and centres across the US – where the shift itself is meant to achieve something, desire attaches to 'gender studies' as being able to do work that 'women's studies' cannot. More broadly though, she asks after the kinds of desires invested in critical terms and objects: what is it that we want or think 'gender' can do? I kept thinking about Wiegman's insights as I

was reading Roof's book. In Wiegman is a suggestion that asking gender to 'do' anything tells us as much about the desires we invest in critique as it does anything about gender. Here, what gender 'is' might also then be a critical term that is invested with certain desires for political transformation, or, a paradigm that is invested with the desires to make certain lives more liveable. Roof's evisceration of the politics of gender performativity, in the end, falls flat. A book dedicated to describing and reworking gender is finally offered as a book that will take us back to sexual difference – yet what this might look like remains unclear. In a book that painstakingly describes, and yes, endlessly lists and taxonomises genders, Roof hopes that this 'better' description of gender will do the work of refocusing us back on sexual difference. But description, in the end, just feels like description, and the politics of this project seem to end here – leaving me thinking less about the problem of sexual difference and more about the ongoing desires we have for gender to do so much work.

Sam McBean

Move it

Bojana Cvejić, *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). 280pp., £58.00 hb., £22.50 pb., 978 1 13743 738 9 hb., 978 1 34955 610 6 pb.

A generation of recent artists have shared the conviction that choreography and dance think. Bojana Cvejić's book seeks both to theorise and defend this conviction. Such artists could defy Susan Sontag's argument against 'assimilat[ing] Art to Thought' because the thinking that they wanted to see was very different from those clichés that Sontag had declared herself sick of in the 1960s ('Phallus', 'Oedipus', 'Decline of the West', and so on). While, however, the Deleuzian critique of 'recognition' provided, for instance, one influential way to escape Sontag's false alternative between thought and feeling, it could only provide a negative criterion for the kind of

thinking that art can do. The frustration of recognition is not in itself thoughtful. As Cvejić rightly notes, we need other concepts, positive concepts, therefore, if we are going to understand what is going on in contemporary choreography. Elaborating one such concept is Cvejić's primary achievement in *Choreographing Problems*: what she calls 'problem-posing'.

Take, for example, Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema's *Weak Dance Strong Questions* (2001). The germ of the piece was a line of poetry: 'neither movement from nor towards'. The first problem is then: how to imagine such a movement. As an initial approach, let us say we're trying to imagine a movement without spatial or temporal structure; or, again, to imagine 'a movement that internalises "the still point"', as Cvejić puts it. This first line of experimentation is imaginative, and the fantasies that it produces constitute, in this way, the starting point for a new problem: how to actually move, work it out in dance. A third problem superposes itself, however, on the first and second. Here, the negated 'from' and 'towards' reveal another aspect of themselves, not as spatio-temporal but rather as syntactic operators. What kind of teleology is involved in the notion of a 'phrase'? Does a phrase go 'towards' punctuation? What kind of punctuation? Burrows and Ritsema ask themselves: If every movement is a statement, is it possible to ask a question by moving? What makes it possible to ask a question? They begin hollowing out the implicit enunciative dimension of their movements, making room for deviations from an assertoric mode.

The artists translate this third problem into two rules, both prohibitive: their movements will not be mere tasks to accomplish, and they will also not become statements. Because the artists are now focused on the refusal of aesthetic teleology in dance (with all of the accent given to the 'towards'), improvisational dance seems to become a crucial part of the 'solution'. But this solution creates the same problem: the dancers must resist their own tendencies 'towards' remembered forms and gestures while improvising. By this point, their research itself becomes problematic, as they resist the tendency to reuse the movements that they discover. So, again, this