THEORISING TRANSPHOBIA AND DEHUMANISATION

Monash University City Campus
750 Collins Street
Room 842

SCHEDULE

Thursday November 26

10:15-10:45am:	Arrival, registration, and morning tea
10:45-11:00am:	Welcome
11:00-12:00pm:	Amy Marvin: The Comedian, the Heckler, and the Hack: Portraits of Self-Destructive Transphobia
12:15 -1:15pm:	Chitizraj Gurung: Fatal Binary: Trans Bodies and Bourgeois Violence
1:15 - 2pm:	Lunch break
2:00-3:00pm:	Marina Sidlow: (Un)reasonable Rationality: Transphobia in Academic Philosophy
3:15-4:15pm:	Rosa Silver: Ontic Injustice and Dehumanisation: From Moral Injury to Normative Exclusion

Friday November 27

10:30-11:00am:	Morning tea
11:00-12pm:	Matthew J. Cull: So, You've Been Publicly Shamed by a Crossdresser
12:15-1:15pm:	Simone Anders: Situated Trans Lives: Telic Power and Institutional Ideals
1:15-2:00pm:	Lunch
2:00-3:00pm:	Michelle Cormier: The Three Steps to Trans Death: Introducing Trans Cyber-Necropolitics
3:15-4:15pm	Suzy Killmister: Dehumanisation, Inferiorisation, and Transmisogyny

ABSTRACTS

Amy Marvin
Hamilton College

The Comedian, the Heckler, and the Hack: Portraits of Self-Destructive Transphobia

Even a cursory glance at archives, media, and testimony provides many ways to link transphobia with dehumanisation. Trans people have been culturally circulated as encroachers, predators, groomers, terrorists, mutants, jokes, monsters, dupes, terrorists, freaks, deceivers, serial killers, disavowed resources for sex, and fakes. These circulations have had lasting effects on our access to safety, autonomy, medicine, public spaces, play, employment, housing, history, cultural production, and the social bases of self-respect.

In this presentation I consider a less studied feature of transphobia and dehumanisation: the ways that fascination with trans people itself risks becoming self-destructive and self-dehumanising. To draw out this dynamic I focus on a specific group: non-trans comedians who grow increasingly fixated on trans people. Drawing from Steven Gimbel's concept of the hack, I argue that such fixations can result in a process I call hackification whereby the comedian's ridicule of trans people increasingly drags them into performing cliche, subpar, distortive, uninformed, and inept material. Drawing parallels to Neil Hamburger's performance of anti-comedy, I focus my discussion on American stand-up comedians Joe Rogan and Dave Chappelle alongside Irish comedy writer Graham Linehan to draw out the mechanics of transphobic hackification and its potential dangers.

Chitizraj Gurung
American University

Fatal Binary: Trans Bodies and Bourgeois Violence

The liberal analysis of contemporary transphobia in Western-style democracies like the United Kingdom and United States frames it as a "culture war" driven by conflicting ideas about what's right for society. This paper asserts that such a loose narrative including that of bigotry alone is insufficient to describe the full bio-materialist grounding for anti-trans dehumanization within bourgeois capitalist society. The economic base of capitalism necessitates a sexual superstructure able to secure its reproduction. Drawing on Maria Mies' concept of "housewifization," this paper argues that capitalism requires a sexual binary of cisgender "man" and "woman" for the creation of "property owners" and "property" to be accepted as natural. The ambiguity of trans bodies threatens to destabilize this binary undergirding capitalist social reproduction. To neutralize this threat, especially in times of instability, bourgeois society deploys clarifying violence to delegitimize the validity of trans lives. Clarifying violence employs the full spectrum of "slow" legal curtailment of spaces allowed to trans bodies and "spectacular" social and physical death. This paper analyzes For

Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers and the subsequent interim guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission as examples of this phenomenon. The retrenchment of trans rights follows a political, economic, and social counterreaction designed to reimpose the faltering prestige of bourgeois authority and capitalism. It does so by attempting to re-secure the biological boundaries upon which exploitative capitalist reproduction and accumulation are based. Accordingly, any emancipatory struggle must take trans rights seriously as an integral part of its wider strategy.

Marina Sidlow
San Francisco State University

(Un)reasonable Rationality: Transphobia in Academic Philosophy

Historically, philosophy has been a problematic discipline. Its no-holds-barred logic leads to uncompromising ideologies that, instead of providing solutions to injustices, often reinforce systems of oppression. According to Mexican existentialist Luis Villoro, this problem highlights the difference between reasonable and unreasonable rationality. Unreasonable rationality relies on abstractions, leading to worldviews that do not adequately account for real-world experiences, thus reproducing systems of subordination through harmful ideology, such as misogyny, transphobia, and racism. Reasonable rationality, on the other hand, is intimately concerned with ethical consequences, lived experiences, and liberation from oppression. Through this framework, reasonable rationality provides the tools to dismantle harmful systems. Using the case of transphobia, I argue that unreasonable rationality pervades academic philosophy because rational argumentation is regarded as essential, objective, and of primary importance. Despite this, our discipline is not irredeemable. While Villoro's work highlights the problems prevalent in philosophy, it also offers a solution. By cultivating Villoro's practice of reasonable rationality and thus prioritizing liberation, philosophy can instead be a productive means of social reform. Indeed, it is morally obligatory that philosophy be done in this way, in order to engage in what Villoro calls genuine philosophy.

I first explore Villoro's notion of unreasonable rationality, including why it is appealing but problematic. I then use the case of transphobia in academic philosophy—specifically in the Journal of Controversial Ideas—to demonstrate how this type of reasoning is present in academic philosophy. Finally, I illustrate what reasonable rationality looks like by drawing on the work of trans philosophers Talia Mae Bettcher and Robin Dembroff.

Rosalind Silver
Monash University

Ontic Injustice and Dehumanisation: From Moral Injury to Normative Exclusion

In a previous paper, I argued that transmisogyny forms a constitutive element of trans women being constructed as a subordinate social kind, a social kind that is made up of unjust constraints and enablements. Which, following Katherine Jenkins, results in trans women living in a situation of ontic injustice. This ontic injustice is understood as the moral injury that is suffered by virtue of one's construction as part of a social kind, in addition to the material and psychological harms that come along with oppression. Further, the threat of

transmisogynistic punishment or abuse for acting outside of these tightly constrained norms can impede, in Mari Mikkola's terms, our 'legitimate human interests' in such a way to constitute dehumanisation.

So, if we take transmisogyny to be a social force that enforces the unjust constraints and enablement of a social kind trans woman, and living under a set of unjust constraints and enablements is what constitutes ontic oppression, then this ontic oppression could be understood as a form of normative dehumanisation, or the exclusion from the norms guiding our treatment of other human beings. That is to say, in addition to its material and psychological harms, part of what makes transmisogyny wrong is that it involves – in essence – treating someone as less than human.

Matthew J. Cull
Trinity College Dublin

So, You've Been Publicly Shamed by a Crossdresser

The Western Rising of 1628-1632 was one the earliest attempts to resist the development of a capitalist mode of production. It was led by cross-dressing people disguised as the figure of Lady Skimmington. Strikingly, this is not the only appearance of cross-dressing figures in the persecution of public and popular justice in the beginnings of capitalism. From rough music and Ceffyl Pren to the groaning at Westonbirt and the Rebbecca Riots, Wales and the West of England featured an astonishing amount of cross-dressing during the period. In this talk, we'll examine the significance of this sort of cross-dressing, its role in dehumanising public shaming, and potential explanations for its reoccurrence throughout the period.

Simone Anders
Monash University

Situated Trans Lives: Telic Power and Institutional Ideals

Telic power is argued by Burman (2022,2023) to be an essential new term for the wider lexicon of social ontology, covering a key component of the social world which traditional accounts of deontic power tend to overlook. Burman establishes teleological normativity and telic power, with telological normativity as being the ideals one lives up to and the expectations that follow. This is contrasted with the deontic claims, which more closely considers demands over ideals. Burman establishes this sense of expectations over demands as a key purpose of her terms regarding telic power. Telic components thus tell us of established norms that follow through with the distinct picture of social power which she establishes. Telic power thus presents a unique feature of the social world. Whilst this is a useful term for the purposes of tracing distinct relations between different types of social power, its applications and uses deserve further discussion, such as the distinctness of her claims of telic power providing something separate from components such as institutional facts. Further adding to this, can telic and deontic components easily come apart? Aren't ideals essentially wedded to deontic practices? Are ideals and expectations co-morbid with demands, duties, and obligations?

In this talk I will make the case that trans accounts of social power provide a more thorough presentation of what category ascription make of us in the light of telic and deontic components. I will present an account in which trans descriptions of the social world have described deontic and telic normativity in the same vein, with explicit consequences for trans people as being constructed as a particular oppressed kind. In discussing these components, I want to make an explicit claim against separating the two kinds of social power as Burman does, and present trans accounts of social power as making more explicit claims regarding how institutional power is formulated and developed regarding trans individuals. I present this account as a form of trans-informed structural critique and that, as structural, institutional, and social pressures formulate trans people into a distinct category of oppressed social kind, accounts of social power are distinctly ones in which trans people's accounts are worth considering in greater depth. In particular, these accounts present a unique kind of harm wherein our capacities to know, our abilities to convey, and the formulations of ourselves as capable epistemic agents is made more outwardly suspect. This talk will thus present trans views on these topics as essential for describing how social power function in relation to the oppression of trans and gender diverse communities.

Michelle Cormier
Monash University

The Three Steps to Trans Death: Introducing Trans Cyber-Necropolitics

Many trans people experience marginalisation and violence in cyberspace, which has served to exacerbate marginalisation and violence in reality leading to a present-day crisis. This violence is characterised by intricate dynamics surrounding voice, identities, bodies, and social interactions, as well as available information about transgender people. To comprehend and provide a theoretical framework for this enduring phenomenon of digital violence, we introduced the concept of Trans Cyber-Necropolitics. Trans Cyber-Necropolitics explains how digital media enforce the disposability of trans people by rendering us visible and viable targets. We decompose this digital death into three steps: sensing, targeting, and invisible killing. Combining with the authors' positionality as transgender gamers, we provide a critical analysis of how each step operates, conducted via a meticulous examination of games, as well as an exploration of the discourse from game design and community-side comments through the lens of critical discourse analysis. This talk extends the paper, addressing how Trans Cyber-Necropolitics is already a deep part of so-called "generative artificial intelligence". Building on this analysis, we ideate how each step could be disrupted with resistance strategies and technological measures.

Suzy Killmister
Monash University

Dehumanisation, Inferiorisation, and Transmisogyny

In a series of exchanges, David Livingstone Smith (2016, 2025) and Kate Manne (2016, 2026) have laid out their respective views on the relationship between dehumanisation and misogyny. Both agree that misogyny is not best understood in terms of dehumanisation. Insofar as they disagree, it is with respect to the scope of dehumanisation: for Smith, dehumanisation remains a vital concept for understanding and explaining racialized

violence, while for Manne most instances of violence and oppression are better understood in terms of social hierarchy.

In this paper I attempt to make progress on this debate by introducing a framework to more clearly differentiate dehumanisation from inferiorisation. Both concepts, I argue, are vital for understanding contemporary forms of oppression. To illustrate this, I apply the distinction to transmisogyny. I aim to show that transmisogyny spans both dehumanisation and inferiorisation, and explore what this means for strategies of countering transmisogyny.