Buried Thorns:

For a queer politics of a potentially invisible multiplicity

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1. The duality of queerness

Thirty years ago, Teresa de Lauretis introduced the term "queer theory" in a special issue of the journal *Differences*. According to their introductory remarks, queer theory, imagined as an approach with a certain critical distance to lesbian/gay studies, is characterized by "a double emphasis- on the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production, and on the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own discourses and their constructed silences" (De Lauretis 1991: iv). What is described in their introduction is, actually, on the one hand the breakaway from thoughts about gay and lesbian sexuality as something enclosed within clearly defined boundaries- "marking the limits of the social space by designating a place of culture" (De Lauretis 1991:iii) while on the other hand, the importance of the differences that have been rendered invisible between lesbian women and gay men, or between black lesbians and white lesbians. Although early queer theory of the late 1980s and early 1990s tends to only refer to the critical deconstruction of identity categories as its defining characteristic, it is worth noting that this dual orientation was clearly stated as a point of departure.

This duality—on the one hand, the assertion of difference (between non-normative sexuality or gender and their normative counterparts), and on the other hand, the notion of universality and solidarity based in it (which challenges the concept of identity as a clearly defined entity)—was a particularly prominent feature of early queer politics and theory, embodying two contradictory yet equally important orientations[1]. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* and the series of discussions by Judith Butler before and after, especially their arguments concerning "gender performativity", can be understood precisely within this context. That is to say, the theory of "gender performativity" was proposed as a response to two demands: on the one hand, it is necessary to resist the invisibilization or nullification of the gender difference marked as "woman"; and yet, on the other hand, we must imagine a politics that does not foreclose it as determined by a naturalized essence, nor preclude the wider and more diverse existences of women. Perhaps, it could be said that this claim was informed by the imperative to create space for lesbians—who had long been rendered invisible and disregarded both theoretically and politically as women and homosexuals—while simultaneously avoiding the impasse of pursuing so-called "lesbian specificity" as completely distinct from heterosexuality[2].

In that sense, Butler's *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, published in 2015, could be understood as a deliberate attempt to re-inherit the political and theoretical steering of queer theory that has continued over the past 30 years, and in particular, the theoretical demands that lay at Butler's own starting point. It is precisely because the central

task of this book is to inquire into the political possibilities opened up when diverse, non-normative bodies, bodies effectively denied the right to exist, nonetheless carve out their own existence through physically appearing and assembling, that the term performative, which had not been so forcefully foregrounded in Butler's writings since the turn of this century, is once again placed in the title[3]. This is also a revisiting of the questions embedded within queer theory and politics for the past 30 years—questions that at once necessitated Butler's theory of gender performativity and have been critically directed at it[4]: if the livability of bodies is opened up through their collective appearing, then to what extent does that very survival depend upon the uniformity of the bodies that appear and assemble? Furthermore, the focus on the differences that are able to appear, and on the gatherings of bodies that are able to assemble, raises the question of to what extent such focus stands in solidarity with those differences for which appearing is more difficult, and with those bodies for which assembling is more difficult; and to what extent it demands the effacement of those very differences and bodies.

Providing any sort of general answer to these questions is, however, beyond the scope and intention of this paper. What this paper attempts is, by taking as one concrete point of reference the feminist debates over trans issues that have been unfolding on Japanese-language social media since the latter half of 2018, to reconfirm the significance, within queer politics, of these questions that pierce, like thorns, into orientations toward solidarity and coexistence. This paper will first present an outline of this debate, confirming that the issue here is a form of solidarity based on the assumption of a specific, uniform vulnerability and its appearance. It will then take up Butler's discussion of political mobilisation of vulnerability in *Assembly*, pointing out that concepts such as "unchosen proximity" and "multiplicity" are elaborated there as a way of carrying forward the duality surrounding difference and solidarity. What can be seen here is a distinctly 1990s-style queer politics that insists that the thorn lodged in the side of solidarity is also the wedge that makes solidarity possible. However, whereas 1990s queer politics and theories tended to emphasize on the politics of visible differences, this paper instead directs attention to plurality that encompasses differences that do not necessarily appear —in other words, the political potential of thorns that remain submerged.

2. Uniform vulnerability

In July 2018, Ochanomizu University announced its decision to allow transgender women to be included among students eligible for university entrance examinations for the 2020 academic year[5]. This decision was based on discussions among various women's universities following the establishment of the 2015 Science Council of Japan's "Subcommittee of the Law Committee on the Protection of LGBTI Rights in Society and Education" and trends in women's universities in the United States (Takahashi 2019, 31-5). While this should have been a positive step forward in the protection of the rights of transgender youth in Japan, it was not an especially radical or surprising turn of events. However, following this announcement, discriminatory comments targeting transgender women, including direct attacks and insults, became a prominent feature on Japanese-language online platforms, particularly on social media sites such as X (formerly known as Twitter) (Iino 2019; Hori 2019). What makes this expression of transphobia noteworthy is that, while it was observed among those who self-identify as conservatives, it was also—in some cases even more so—upheld by women and feminists[6]. Following the announcement of Ochanomizu University on 2 July, one of the first high-profile reactions on social media was a post from right-wing author Hyakuta Naoki on X[7] ridiculing transgender female students as (hetero-

sexual) men infiltrating a women's-only university. Despite the immediate criticism this kind of mockery from conservatives attracted, the exact same view regarding transgender women as "men invading women's spaces" began to be widely expressed, shared, and disseminated on social media by some women and feminists[8].

The differences and conflicts among feminists concerning transgender issues are not new (Tsutsui 2003b; Califa 2005; Yamada 2019), and since the 2010s, the resurgence of these conflicts has become increasingly prevalent in various countries and regions that have been making strides towards the protection of transgender rights, with the UK playing a leading role. The situation on Japanese-speaking social media is not an isolated case in this sense. Indeed, rhetoric that portrays transgender women as intruders into women's spaces and usurpers of women's hard-won rights, denounciations that depict transgender lesbians as mere heterosexual men forcing lesbians and bisexual women to engage in sexual acts, and reductionist views that recognize no form of "bodily sex" other than that which is reducible to differences in external genitalia, bear striking similarities to those presented in past debates. It is also known that several accounts have actively spread these arguments from a foreign-language context into the Japanese–speaking context. It is still crucial, however, to examine the ways in which a globally circulating transphobic discourse has manifested locally within the Japanese-speaking sphere. What stands out in this regard is the overwhelming appeal of arguments related to women's bodily fears and sexual traumas.

The logic and rhetoric of criticism and exclusion directed towards transgender (especially transfeminine) individuals that have been introduced and disseminated on Japanese-speaking social media can be broadly categorised into several distinct groups. For example, firstly, given the physical and sexual fears and traumas that "biological" women are subjected to, they argue that (gendered) spaces for women should be explicitly restricted to "biological" women, or at the least, those without penises, and that transgender women are a threat to these boundaries. Secondly, they argue that transgender women are able to avoid gender discrimination and disadvantages that cisgender women have faced since childhood due to their "biological"[9] female bodies. Therefore, they claim that providing trans women access to the limited opportunities available exclusively to women merely preserves and reinforces existing discriminatory structures. Or, thirdly, they assert that gender is nothing more than a discriminatory construct based on the biological differences between two sexes. As a result, the discussion of recognising gender self-identification, which does not necessarily align with biological sex distinctions, is perceived as a form of contempt for women's experience as a discriminated minority. Although all of these arguments have been presented repeatedly, there is a clear difference in terms of the explosive impact on Japanese social media. To illustrate, in the English-speaking world, the second claim is frequently discussed along the issue of the impact of high performance in high school girls' sports on opportunities for higher education. In the Japanese-speaking world, however, this example does not garner such widespread support. Even with regard to the admission of trans students to women's universities, claims of opportunity usurpation are not as important. What has been more prominent is a sense of sympathy associated with the first argument, namely that female students who suffer from the trauma of sexual violence would not be able to receive education in a safe environment. The third claim, too, is frequently presented in Anglophone feminist discourse within the context of discussions on how to understand the concept of gender; and yet, it is more often repurposed, in the Japanese-speaking context, to reinforce the focus on the sexual fears and traumas experienced by

"innate" women on the basis of biological sex difference[10].

The focus on the physical and sexual fears and traumas of "innate" women has a strong affective appeal across a wide audience. This is evident in the assertion that the use of women's restrooms and public baths by transgender women, who (may) have a penis, threatens the safety and comfort of 'innate' women, and therefore should not be allowed. The claim has been taken up not only by women and feminists, including of sexual violence survivors active on social media (Hori 2019, 7; Ozaki 2019, 12; Mitsuhashi 2019, 17–18), but also by conservatives who argue that the claims for rights of LGBTI people has "gone too far"[11]. However, the relentless gender surveillance, particularly in public restrooms, significantly hinders the freedom of movement and activity of transgender people, as well as exerts pressure on the daily lives of individuals[12] who may not necessarily identify as transgender but do not conform to certain expected gender appearances (Halberstam 1998: 20-29; Tsutsui 2003a: 55-57). Moreover, it is impossible, from a purely practical standpoint, to check the presence or absence of someone's male genitalia in restrooms without severe human rights violations. The notion of transgender women exposing their male genitalia in the women's section of public bath is also far removed from actual reality (Endo 2019; Mitsuhashi 2019: 18-19). When women and feminists critical of trans inclusion insist on these claims despite the fact that such critiques have been repeatedly articulated, what emerges is a desire to secure the uniformity of "womanhood" through an imagined sameness of sexual and bodily vulnerability, and, in turn, to locate the very foundation of solidarity among "women" in the protection from that vulnerability. In other words, for those who persistently seek to police access to women's restrooms and women's section in public baths, the issue is not whether a given user will actually commit an act of sexual violence; indeed, whether the person possesses a penis is scarcely the real concern. The question is whether a body can be recognised as that which could be penetrated and injured by a penis[13], and whether it is possible to share the agenda setting where protection from that injury is of paramount importance - no matter what other injuries might be inflicted in the process. For a body to be fully secured against such harm, it is necessary that bodies are clearly discernible whether they are situated on the side that inflicts harm or the side vulnerable to it: bodies whose appearance renders this membership ambiguous, or whose actual position diverges from their appearance, can by that very fact become removed from the collective framing of the problem, and may thereby lose their claim to solidarity.

3. Mobilising vulnerability

As *Assembly* points out, "feminist theorists have for a long time argued that women suffer social vulnerability disproportionately" and while "there is always a risk in claiming that women are especially vulnerable [...] there is still something important to be taken from this tradition" (Notes: 140)[14]. Butler, who repeatedly cautions that they are "especially aware of how counterproductive it can be to understand women's bodies as particularly vulnerable" (Notes: 139), nevertheless attempts " a consideration of vulnerability as a form of activism, or as that which is in some sense mobilized in forms of resistance" (Notes: 123), precisely because "vulnerability implicates us in what is beyond us yet part of us, constituting one central dimension of what might tentatively be called our embodiment" (Notes: 149)[15].

As embodied beings, we cannot, however, sustain survival on our own and always require support from the outside. The body "despite its clear boundaries, or perhaps precisely by virtue of those very boundaries, is defined by the relations that make its own life and action possible" (Notes: 130): it is dependent "on other bodies and support networks"(Notes:

130)– "precisely because bodies are formed and sustained in relation to infrastructural support (or their absence) and social and technological networks or webs of relations, we cannot extract the body from its constituting relations – and those relations are always economically and historically specific" (Notes: 148). In order to survive, a body must inevitably be open and exposed to various relations with things that are not itself, and therefore all bodies are without exception vulnerable. ("Vulnerability may be a function of openness, that is, of being open to a world that is not fully known or predictable." (Notes: 149)) For this reason, instead of making the futile effort of closing the body off of external exposure in order to eliminate the possibility of being harmed, Butler argues, we should work "to think vulnerability and agency together" (Notes: 139) and explore the possibility in which "vulnerability is itself mobilized, not as an individual strategy, but in concert" (Notes: 151).

This is a particularly important strategy for those whose existence is disproportionally threatened socially and politically. As Butler emphasises, the fact that all bodies are necessarily vulnerable neither presents a general ontology of the body nor gives a universal importance to vulnerability. The various relations that constitute a body are "always economically and historically specific," and therefore, "if we say that the body is vulnerable, we are saying that the body is vulnerable to economics and to history" (Notes: 148). If this is the case, when certain bodies are deprived of the relations that sustain them and rendered disproportionate susceptible, one of the crucial means for those bodies to survive would be to politically demand the restoration of those various relations. "[U]nder conditions in which infrastructures are being decimated, the very platform for politics becomes the object around which political mobilization rallies" (Notes: 128-9). Bodies that have been deprived of their various relations and whose survival is threatened then give purpose to political mobilisation by exposing their vulnerability. Bodies that are not permitted to exist and emerge as having political agency, nevertheless, through their coming together as vulnerable bodies without such permission, retroactively - or perhaps I should say performatively - demand the relations that make their survival possible. In other words, "the political demand is at once enacted and made, exemplified and communicated" (Notes: 137).

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Butler expresses concern that such political strategies that do not position vulnerability and agency in a mutually exclusive relationship may risk universalising and essentialising vulnerability in a gendered form. Arguments that define women by their inherent vulnerability appeals to paternalistic powers, such as the state, to protect them. Certain attributes that define gender, such as vulnerability, have been unequally distributed under particular power regimes "precisely for the purpose of shoring up certain regimes of power that disenfranchise women" (Notes: 142–143). One example would be the discourse of online trans-critical groups that insist on the safety of "innate women" in public spaces and prioritises their protection from sexual violence (and from any experiences that might evoke trauma from past violence—for example, fearig that women's restrooms they use might also be occupied by women with penises): they draw, on one hand, upon the "tradition" of feminism, while, on the other, invoking claims such as the heightened severity of sexual harm to "innate women" due to their reproductive capacity as justification for protecting these women. In this context, the primary concern is not the violation of women's sexual and reproductive rights, but rather the potential abuse of the reproductive function that women are expected to fulfil in a patriarchal society.

More directly relevant to the discussion in this paper, however, is the passage where Butler speaks of "a distinct zone of vulnerability" as a risk posed by the mo-

bilisation of vulnerability. "The very debate about who belongs to a group called 'women' marks a distinct zone of vulnerability, namely, those who are non-gender conforming, and whose exposure to discrimination, harassment, and violence is clearly heightened on those grounds [by basing the definition of women on the concept of vulnerability]" (Notes: 142). This sentence is not immediately followed by a discussion of the circumstances under which "the debate about who belongs to the group called 'women'" is deployed to deliberately attack those referred to here through the proprietary claim to vulnerability[16]. Nevertheless, when Butler cites examples of the "strategic use of vulnerability" by majorities – for example masculinity is said to be 'attacked' by feminism, the general public by gender/sexual minorities, whites by Latinos, or Europeans by new immigrant communities – those instances can easily be recognized as resonating with the claim that trans women threaten penetrable and violable "women's bodies" by the penis.

It is understandable, then, that Butler introduces the notion of *plurality* when the collective mobilization of vulnerability is invoked as a response to the condition in which certain populations are placed in unevenly vulnerable positions(Notes: 151). As stated before, vulnerability has always been distributed according to specific historical and economic arrangements; Butler does not aim to present it as an ontology of the body. But then again, to define certain groups—often those who can be indeed described as disproportionately vulnerable – as characterised by a shared uniform vulnerability also constitutes a big issue of its own. Thus, the collective mobilisation of vulnerability brings us back to the questions posed by early queer politics and theory: how to attempt solidarity without silencing the claims of bodies that struggle to gather or differences that struggle to appear. The "notion of plurality that is thought together with both performativity and interdependency" (Notes: 151) is required by the orientation towards solidarity that contains – or perhaps I should rather say constituted by– difference. What should be noted here is that plurality here is by no means a way of avoiding vulnerability. Butler points out that interdependency, here linked to the concept of plurality, does not signify some "beautiful state of coexistence" or "social harmony," but rather that "there is no way to dissociate dependency from aggression once and for all" (Notes: 151). The concept of plurality thus concerns the importance of the situations in which vulnerable entities are forced to coexist despite posing threats to each other's existence. It is precisely this very situation that constitutes "coalition," and thus solidarity based on differences, which Butler demonstrates through quoting Bernice Johnson Leigon: "Most of the time you feel threatened to the core and if you don't, you're not really doing no coalescing... You don't go into coalition because you like it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody who could possibly kill you, is because that's the only way you can figure you can stay alive" (Notes: 151-52). "The body is always exposed to people and impressions it does not have a say about, does not get to predict or fully control," and "solidarity emerges from this rather than from deliberate agreements we enter knowingly" (Notes: 152). Rather than hastily resolving the differences that make it difficult for bodies to come and be together—the differences that sometimes threatens each other's existence—we let these differences remain unresolvable, let them stay as difficulties and threats. It is precisely there that Butler finds the possibiliteies of coexistence and solidarity.[17]

4. Buried thorns

In a sense, this is a profoundly 1990s form of queer politics. As Butler stated in a different chapter of *Assembly*, "[one] political point probably has remained pretty much the same [Since the 1990s when they wrote 'Gender Trouble'] even as my focus has shifted, and that is that

identity politics fails to provide a broader conception of what it means, politically, to live together, across differences, sometimes in modes of unchosen proximity, especially when living together, however difficult it may be, remains an ethical and political imperative" (Notes: 27). When living together is thus articulated as a form of "unchosen proximity", this proximity should not be understood as merely abstract or ideal. It may,for example, refer to the "unchosen proximity" in gendered public spaces (for both cisgender women, who fear the "threat" posed by trans women, and trans women, who fear the risk of being targeted by transphobia); it may also refer to the "unchosen proximity" of "we are already here", as queer activism in the 1990s has repeatedly asserted, in the face of the homophobic and discriminatory society looking away from and denying "our" existence. A little earlier in the previous passage, Butler states: "when people amass on the street, one implication seems clear: they are still here and still there; they persist" (Notes: 25). It is difficult not to hear it this the echo of one of the best-known chants of 1990s queer politics: Queer Nation's "We are here, we are queer, get used to it." The power of this chant lies in its performative declaration that queer "we", not fitting in "here" (=straight society) and therefore deemed expendable whether through homophobic hate crimes or AIDS, nonetheless have persisted/are persisting "here" as such. In this sense "persistence" is linked first and foremost to the assertion of difference. In other words, Queer Nation's chant can be read as an assertion towards the possibility of solidarity based on difference: a declaration that "we are the thorn in solidarity's side".

At the same time, however, it has often been pointed out that these claims of difference in the 1990s tended to go hand in hand with the literal visualisation of difference, and that it had the effect of bringing specific differences into focus in accordance with their historical and economic *appearability*. The strategy of visually asserting difference, as is exemplified by the fact that Queer Nation's eye-catching activisms were often termed 'advertisement-like', became increasingly indistinguishable from the marketing strategies of late capitalism[18]. In order for the "advertising methods" that promote specific differences to be effective, it is often necessary for other differences to be sidelined as superfluous or excessive. Thus, for those who were neither imagined as consumers of shopping malls nor even supposed to be there, such as racial minorities or the poor, Queer Nation's "advertising" activism, most notably its so-called "mall actions," could function as an exclusionary form of action[19]. What was desired was a difference noticeable enough to catch the consumer's attention, but not to the extent that they might look away: a difference that stimulates the majority's desire just enough without threatening them. If that is the case, then we might conversely argue that, for the majority consuming these politics of visibility, what is as undesirable as an excessively visible difference that compels aversion is a difference so unremarkable that fails to attract attention, to the point of being difficult to even recognise or detect.

These are differences that are difficult to detect, that appear, at first glance, to conform to the majority: buried, "passing" differences. In the context of the Japanese transgender community, the term *maibotsu* (literally translated as "burying oneself", or in this case "going stealth") refers to a state where an individual lives socially as their desired gender without disclosing or being recognized as having transitioned or being in the process of transitioning[20]. In a broader sense, however, we might take *maibotsu* to include any situation in which a person successfully *passes* as their desired gender within a specific social context of everyday life. Aiming to blend in with the majority, *Maibotsu* may seem far removed from the strategy of the queer nation, which asserts an "unchosen proximity" by boldly declaring "we, who are different, are

here, no matter if you, the majority, likes it or not." However, Queer Nation's chant also seems to allow for a slightly different interpretation as well: "we" have already been here, without "you" knowing, and that although "we" are different and queer, "we" have always been indistinguishably adjacent to "you". Understood in this way, it can be comprehended as somewhat different from a self-identifying declaration such as "We are the thorns, look at us." Rather, this is a message that the thorns constituting this unchosen proximity have already been here, without being detected or recognised, hence remaining unremoved. What is crucial here is not not su much to point out that "the thorn is here" as to make it retrospectively obvious that the thorn "was somewhere around here", thereby hinting that even now it "will/must still be somewhere around here".

This insistence on a difference that remains, so to speak, buried is sometimes understood as a threat to solidarity, even more so than that which is visualized. When the qualification for solidarity is contingent on bodies with uniform vulnerability and their detectable appearance—this is the exact point to which trans-critical women's and feminists' arguments often return, as discussed in section two, — their vigilance will be all the more intensified. This is how the following tweet by an account that had long been speaking out as a transgender person came to be repeatedly referenced on Japanese-language social media as evidence to support fears about "trans women threatening the sexual and physical safety of cisgender women." : "You know, I'd go into the women's public bath with my dick tucked between my thighs and go ' Y'alright?'. Am I a little too crass or what?"[21] Whether this was a true story or, as the speaker later explained, a fictional one, what is being told here is an episode in which entering a women's bath was/is not an issue, and in this sense, and, in that sense, is nothing more than a story about escaping detection and passing as a woman. Other female guests in the women's bath either did not detect the tucked penis, or, even if they might not have found it agreeable, nonetheless shared an "unchosen proximity" with a body that could use the facilities that way, allowing that body to pass as one entitled to the women's section, and did not report or complain to the management afterwards—which clearly is the point of this story. Of course, if this anecdote was fictional, one could still point out that it is an overly optimistic story, and that actually encountering such a body in the women's section of a public bath surely would be so threatening for cisgender women that they would never accept coexistence. However, this was not what most of the criticism towards the aforementioned tweet argued. What was repeatedly voiced in reference to this tweet was the fear of trans women entering the women's sections of public baths with their male genitalia exposed. As discussed in chapter two, the image of trans women using the women's section in public baths exposing their male genitalia is totally divorced from the reality of trans lives. That a story about passing as a user of the women's bath precisely by *making the penis invisible* ("tucked between the thighs") should be transformed into a story about *the conspicuous exposure* of the penis, however, is not because the latter is more suited to instilling fear. The reason why "dick tucked between my thighs and go 'Y'alright?'" provoked strong reactions from trans -critical commentators is that it speaks a posteriori of the existence of differences that are not exposed and therefore not detectable from outward appearance. Moreover, it is also because of the intentionally casual manner it talks about how easy it is to elude detection[22]. The statement was received not only as disrespecting the fantasy of security and safety supposedly brought by coexistence or solidarity based on uniform vulnerability and their detectable appearance—"By the way, I was there, too, just with my dick tucked between my thighs, but you didn't even notice, did you?"— but as threatening the very basis

of that fantasy. In other words, it was taken as callously suggesting the possibility that the difference between cis- and trans- women may not be detectable. To alter the story of *maibotsu* (being buried; going stealth) and passing into one of conspicuous exposure is, then, nothing other than a gesture of denial of that very possibility, a return to the fantasy that there must be a visibly detectable difference.

This is why assertions of fear and anxiety about the possibility of trans women with a penis using women's toilets—"If trans women with a penis can use women's toilets, then it will reach a point where cisgender men can sneak in," or "If the use of women's toilets isn't limited to people without a penis, cisgender women will feel too afraid to use public restrooms"—cannot be soothed with the explanations such as "Trans women who use women's restrooms are already passing as women, regardless of whether they have a penis or not, and any cis man who can blend in equally well could also pass as cis women and enter", or "It is entirely unrealistic to base the right to use women's restrooms on the presence or absence of a penis of a person, and it would result in newly/freshly exclude those who have a penis and are already using the facilities without a problem." The real scandal here is not the possibility that trans women might use women's restrooms, or even the possibility that this might lead to cis men with a penis gaining entry; the scandal lies in the realization that trans women have already been using women's restrooms, and doing so without being detected. The claim of buried differences confronts us with the fact that "unchosen proximity" has already been unfolding, whether we are aware of it or not. Our bodies are exposed to "people and impressions [the bodies do] not have a say about, [do] not get to predict or fully control,"(Notes: 152) and they are compelled to coexist and form solidarity with those who may threaten each other's survival. The claim of buried differences urges one to be self-aware of that, whether wanted or not. It is, in some respects, only natural that those who are disproportionately vulnerable - such as women living in a sexist society – should perceive such "unchosen proximity" as especially threatening: the more one is situated in a position of socially and historically heightened vulnerability, the higher the risk of not being able to survive the coexistence. Yet at the same time, precisely for that reason, it has to be recalled that those who occupy a minority position—those more vulnerable in a given situation—are the first to be made aware of unchosen proximity. If you only realize after the fact that proximity has occurred without you noticing it, then that very belatedness indicates that you are in that particular situation among those privileged to bear lesser risk of coexistence.

The claim of the buried differences can thus be understood as a call for sharing the risks associated with proximity and coexistence more equally—rather than overburdening certain bodies with the excessive risk of visibility or detection in order to maintain the fantasy that no differences exist that do not manifest in a detectable form, do not exist. It advocates for the collective assumption of the risks of unchosen proximity to which all bodies are inevitably and involuntarily exposed to. Moreover, any strategy for survival would be meaningless if it did not begins from the premise of the inevitable proximity; and if so, this call can also be seen as an appeal to reduce the risks for all bodies and increase the possibility of survival. This call is not made at the expense of exposing the already disproportionately vulnerable bodies of minorities to further threats, but rather through the survival of those bodies that may not be detectable. In other words, it is through those bodies that are not clearly apparent and visible but have nonetheless certainly appeared and survived.

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Endnotes

[1] De Lauretis describes this as "claiming at once equality and difference" (De Lauretis 1991: iii). Queer politics is "characterized by the emphasis on difference on the one hand, solidarity based on universality and commonality on the other, and the search for a difficult balance between the two" (Shimizu 2018: 15). See Shimizu (2018) for a discussion of how these characteristics are manifested in the chants of the Queer Nation, which are also discussed in the second half of this paper.

[2] The latter dilemma regarding "lesbian specificity" and the erasure of existence is briefly summarised in Butler (1993).

[3] The fact that the concept of performativity was expected to be a site of action despite this, Butler explains in their book that they "tried to locate in gender performativity a form of inadvertent agency" (Notes: 32).

[4] These questions are closely related, for example, to debates over the political efficacy of "coming out" in the face of growing AIDS panic and homophobia (Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1990), to the racial and class bias of queer politics as discussed below (Cohen 1997), or to critique of the visual politics of early queer theory (Tyler 1991; Martin 1994).

[5] The exact wording of the document dated 10 July 2018 published by Ochanomizu University is as follows; "Ochanomizu University has decided to accept those who wish to study at a women's university based on their gender identity (transgender students who are male according to their family register, but whose gender identity is female)" ("Regarding the acceptance of transgender students"). http://www.ao.ocha.ac.jp/menu/001/040/d006117.html

[6] With regard to discussions and posts on Japanese-speaking social media, it is not possible to clearly identify the gender or political position of the speaker, as many accounts in the Japanese-speaking

world that stand on the side of trans critics in this debate do not use their real names. When I refer to "women and feminists" here, I have in mind cases where the speakers themselves identify themselves as women or feminists, or where they have been regarded as speakers belonging loosely to the "feminist cluster" prior to this debate.

[7] @hyakutanaoki (Naoki Hyakuta), "Okay, I'm going to try to study for the entrance exam now and aim for admission to Ochanomizu University in 2020!" X, 5 July 2018, 1:57 am, https://twitter.com/hyakutanaoki/status/1014553691850924033?s=20.

[8] Several articles detailing the background of this issue have been published in the June 2019 special edition of "Women's Asia 21" by the Asia-Japan Women's Resource Center, titled "Feminism and Trans Exclusion". Additionally, several articles can be read on the WAN Women's Action Network website under the tag "With transgender people" (https://wan.or.jp/general/category/transgender accessed 20 Aug 2019). However, as Haruka Tsutsui points out, as of summer 2019, almost all articles by feminists are on one side of the debate (the trans-inclusive side), as there were no feminist researchers, activists or others in the Japanese-speaking world who were presenting trans-critical discussions under their own names (Tsuitsui 2019). An exception is an English-language contribution published in WAN, but the full name of the author is not listed (Fukuoka 2019).

[9] The exact definition of what constitutes a "biological woman" varies from speaker to speaker and is not necessarily uniform, but it is often used to refer to a person who has physical characteristics medically considered to be female and whose legally assigned sex at birth is female. The term also often implies that trans women (who are not "biological women") are "only those who later became/have come to claim to be women (and are therefore not sufficiently female)".

[10] Perhaps part of the reason why discussions around trans (women) on Japanese-speaking social media sites have tended to emphasise the fear and trauma of sexual violence experienced by "biological" women is also due to the timing of the controversy. At this time, accusations of sexual violence began to gradually increase in the Japanese-speaking world, encouraged by the rise/climax of the #MeToo movement in the Anglophone world. There was also a growing sense of shared outrage toward secondary perpetration, such as disregarding accusations and slandering the accuser. Ochanomizu University's announcement took place precisely amid the public attention drawn to the BBC documentary on journalist Shiori Itō, who publicly disclosed herself under her real name as a victim of sexual abuse, and the ensuing criticism on social media sites when Sugita Mio, an incumbent member of the House of Representatives, blamed Itō for being a victim (Hori 2019).

[11] For example, former House of Councillors member Daigo Matsuura criticised the Opposition's proposed LGBT Understanding Promotion Act on an internet TV programme in January 2019, arguing that, under this bill, it would be "discrimination" not to allow "women with male genitalia" into changing rooms and women's baths, and that "the feeling of being afraid cannot be changed". For a refutation of this claim, see Endo (2019). In addition, "Viewpoint", a web column site operated by the conservative media outlet Sekai Nippō, published a critical article in August 2018, following the announcement by Ochanomizu University, entitled "'Transgender women's admission to women's universities: "gender identity" makes eligibility for entrance examinations ambiguous". The site also promptly published an article titled, "Human classification and 'discrimination': universities avoiding gender labels/indications?", in response to Matsuura's remarks, asked: "In public baths and hot springs, even if you have male genitalia, if your gender identity is female, you can't refuse to take a woman's bath, can you?".

[12] It has been reported on social media that there are quite a lot cisgender women who have actually experienced being questioned based on their appearance when using women's restrooms. This may be due in part to the fact that trans women, for whom the risks of being outed (when being found out as trans women) are high, are less likely to use women's restrooms unless they are sure that they can pass as cisgender women (Tsuitsui 2003a; Mitsuhashi 2019).

[13] Needless to say, whether a body can be penetrated and (thus) injured by a penis is not determined by gender nor by presence or absence of a vagina (surgically formed or not). However, as can be confirmed by claims on social media that sexual violence suffered by cis women is more severe than that by trans women because of the possibility of pregnancy, there is sometimes a trend in claims emphasising the risk of sexual violence against "biological" women. This perspective tends to underestimate the possibility of a body other than

that of a "biological" woman being penetrated and injured by a penis.

[14] In critiquing arguments that emphasize the so-called "threat" posed by trans women, Iino Yuriko also takes as premise that "it is a fact that the risk of sexual violence against women remains high, and that as a result many women are compelled to maintain a heightened vigilance against male violence, and that anyone who denies this fact is committing a serious error" (Iino 2019:40).

[15] Butler discusses this in a different paper, published in 2011, in the form of "If survival depends not so much on the policing of boundary [...] but on recognizing how we are bound to others" (Butler 2011: 385).

[16] This may be partially due to the time and place *Assembly* was written. Even though trans-critical and exclusionary feminism had already become discerbible in the 1970s, as mentioned above, what are now prominently visible in the Anglosphere as trans-critical feminists (they often call themselves gender-critical feminists) are generally understood to have emerged around the middle of the 2010s, most notably among U.K.-based writers. See for example Burns (2019).

[17] In her 2003 work, Eve Sedgwick focuses on a domain where "finitely many(n>2)" individuals coexist while maintaining their plurality, in order to "[enable] a political vision of difference that might resist both binary homogenization and infinitizing trivialization" (Sedgwick 2003; 108). She portrays the relationship as one of "being beside" (the condition of being adjacent), which is filled with contradiction and resistance, moving towards both "painful individuation" and "uncontrollable relationality" (Sedgwick 2003; 37). It seems important to note that both Butler and Sedgwick, who are known as leading exponents of early queer theory, try to think about issues of difference and coexistence/solidarity through a field of plurality that does not exclude (but rather respects) the possibility of conflict. This shared orientation toward a non-harmonizing coexistence seems crucial to any understanding of queer politics. See also Shimizu (2019) for a detailed discussion of Sedgwick's argument.

[18] On the pursuit of visibility in queer politics in the 1990s and its affinity with the neoliberal market and the resulting tendency to devalue racial minorities and the economically poor, see Shimizu (2013) and Shimizu (2018).

[19] Queer Nation's mall visibility actions, in which large groups dressed in for example drag to attract the public's attention and distribute political leaflets, had the intention to hijack a straight space and "sell" queer desires by visibly inserting queer bodies into shopping malls, which were supposed to be places for the exchange of straight desires (Berlant and Freeman 1992). However, as Cohen (1997) points out, this action isn't always easy for racial minorities, even if it is possible for white queers, who aren't blamed for aimlessly wandering around in shopping malls.

[20] An interesting point is that the issue that was often overlooked by 1990s queer theory and politics, which pursued the political possibilities of the manifestation of difference/appearance, was swiftly addressed not only by scholars focusing on femme lesbians (Tyler 1991; Martin 1994), but also by studies dealing with transsexuals—those seeking to "become" men or women (Prosser 1998). As Prosser stated: "The transexual doesn't necessarily look differently gendered" (Prosser 1998: 43).

[21] This post was in response to a comment from an acquaintance who identified as *X-gender* (which is similar to non-binary), who wondered whether they are truly ready to identify as *X-gender* while still using gendered spaces in everyday life.

The full post is as follows:

@hinakoozaki (Ozaki Hinako "Ginjō Short Stories vol.3" Now on sale)

"@tubu0430 Whoa, is the bar really that high? You know, I'd go into the women's public bath with my dick tucked between my thighs and go 'Y'alright?' . Am I a little too crass or what? Also, if I'm in a hurry I use the men's toilet. Standing up to pee is just easier, you know. I kind of use the term *X-gender* for that kind of zigzagging gender."

X (formerly known as Twitter), 2012.11.11 12:04 AM, https://twitter.com/hinakoozaki/status/267281477891395584?s=20

The author of the post later stated that the twee was "fiction" and she apologised for her careless comments made in a conversation with an acquaintance more than five years ago, which were then taken out of context and used as the basis for criticism of trans women (https://twitter.com/hinakoozaki/status/1111895157295579136?s=20).

[22] Needless to say, this casualness emerges from the context described in the previous note. In reality, it is not so easy for gender noncorming bodies in gendered spaces to avoid the policing gaze that attempts to make them visible, as discussed in section two.