Trans materialities

edited by Max van Midde, Ludovico Vick Virtù, and Olga Cielemęcka

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Editorial – Trans materialities

Max van Midde, Ludovico Vick Virtù, and Olga Cielemęcka

KEYWORDS: trans materiality, trans-led perspective, embodiment, trans studies

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This collection of essays puts on the agenda the multiple constellations and meanings of trans materiality. Trans materiality as an umbrella term refers to the material reality created by the oppressive structures built into the medical, psychiatric, legal and scientific regimes that control trans bodies; the binary normative system of sex/gender; as well as their intersections with racism and history of colonialism that produce violence. However, trans materialities are also defined and composed of the lived experiences and embodied knowledges of trans folks, in trans communities, social movements and organising, and through production of culture, language, art, and affective work of care and resistance (see, e.g., Raha 2017).

Trans materialities should not be understood as a neat and concise concept. It is a fluid, hybrid, and diffractive term that is shaped and reshaped by authors featured in this special issue. With this issue we convey a special interest in envisioning trans materialities as intra-actions, to use Karen Barad's (2007) concept indicating radical relationality and interdependency, between trans bodies and subjectivities, material reality, and theorizations of matter.

The authors of essays included in this special issue write and re-write trans materiality with auto-ethnography, new materialisms, posthumanisms, experiential and creative techniques, while engaging the legacy of trans studies scholarship, along with feminist and queer interventions and Indigenous critique. The authors not only employ their academic expertise and research skills, but also draw on experience and knowledge often devalued in academic publishing and academia at large: on their activism, personal, embodied experience, community wisdom, and bring these perspectives together. In so doing they challenge the of-

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ten rigid and exclusionary limits of academic legitimacy that tend to diminish the role of knowledge (especially trans knowledge) produced outside of it.

In composing this collection we were invested in epistemological, ethical and political questions of knowledge production and power and we adopted two main criteria to guide our work. Firstly, we aimed at a trans-led perspective that would underscore the theorizing fostered by trans scholars. We take seriously objections expressed by scholars such as Viviane Namaste (2009), Jay Prosser (1998), and Sade Kondelin (2014) towards research that uses trans bodies instrumentally, as metaphors or tools to formulate theories on gender and sexuality, and as a result, appropriates the narrative around trans bodies and operationalizes the lived reality of trans people. For our authors, trans is not a decontextualized tool nor an abstraction, but a personal, communal, analytical, reflexive, and often political praxis (see, e.g., van der Drift, 2018). Secondly, we wanted this issue to do ever developing intersectional work, showing how trans materiality is shaped by and at the same time shapes other interconnected dimensions of lived experiences such as class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and Indigeneity, among others.

We open this collection with the article "Revisiting the *wildcat strike in the gender factory*: Material effects of classification" by j. vreer verkerke. verkerke, who is a trans rights activist and organizer, takes up a central theme of this special issue of materiality by exposing the material, lived effects of a legal-medical conundrum in which trans people find themselves caught. This essay gives our readers a concise introduction to the history of defining the transgender body, specifically by looking at psychiatric classifications that aim to capture and delineate it. Against these classifications – that aim at fixing the subject to stabilize its gender identity within a binary sex/gender system, and at "fixing" or "healing" it – verkerke unmasks not only the violence inherent to these classifications but also their historicity and contingency. While today's legal gender recognition, verkerke explains, all too often depends on mental health diagnosis, such medical-legal entanglement becomes something that trans individuals have to navigate on a daily basis. Trans individuals are not, however, "docile subjects" (Foucault, 1977; Pearce at al., 2018) merely co-produced and subjugated by this system; rather, while being affected by it, they also interpret, resist, and organize against it. Therefore the focus is rather on the affirmative aspect – on the struggle against pathologization and medicalization of trans experience. Resisting the medical-psychiatric power, trans emerges

as a movement against the fixing/fixating of trans bodies and lives. In an analogy to what Susan Stryker writes about transitioning as "a movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting point – rather than any particular destination or mode of transition" (Stryker, 2008, p. 1), here as well trans is a movement of opening possibilities away from an imposed dichotomy of the Western sex/gender system. Or, to use a metaphor that verkerke reclaims, trans is a mode of resistance capable of stalling the "gender factory" that produces "fixed" gendered subjectivities and bodies.

Next, in their respective contributions, Jacob Lau and Julius Thissen open questions around transitioning and transmasculinity. While Lau offers an intimate, auto-ethnographic account of how his mixed-race body is decoded during his transitioning process, Thissen's photography series investigates hypermasculine contexts such as a gym, a boxing club, or a car repair shop. Both contributions, albeit in very different ways, direct the reader toward rethinking trans experiences of gender through complex and contextualized inter-dimensional lenses. While Thissen's pictures aesthetically hint at whiteness as one of the markers that plays a role in how (trans)gendered bodies are being read and valued; in Lau's essay "Transition as decreation" race plays a major role in understanding how bodies are socially constructed. A racialized and gendered body that is "hard-to-read" for others here opposes a white cis-gaze by its ability of "seeing slantwise" (Ahmed, 2006). Distracting and disturbing cisnormativity (an assumption that cis-bodies are the norm) and white optics (that invisibilizes non-white experiences and bodies; Sullivan, 2007), "seeing slantwise opens up mixed trans bodies to nonlinear ways of organizing and feeling out their embodied histories that does not adhere to cisnormative time" (Lau in this volume).

While this collection looks at various aspects of materiality of trans lives, Saoirse O'Shea's essay explores the question of passing (and a refusal to pass) and sexuality. In a personal account, O'Shea addresses the questions of violence inflicted on trans people, a desire for intimacy, and how all too often being close with someone, sexuality or emotionally, puts trans folks at a risk of violence in a transphobic society. At the same time, refusing to pass is yet another mode of an embodied material resistance put up against a system that wants to categorize bodies as either/or: male or female, passing or not. The question of sexuality and a trans or queer body as desirable and erotic is also central for Robin Bauer's article, "Cybercocks and Holod-

icks: Renegotiating the Boundaries of Material Embodiment in Les-bi-trans-queer BDSM." Bauer and his interview partners examine the properties and boundaries of bodies in BDSM encounters. Entering into a dialogue with feminist techno-science and new materialisms (Haraway, Barad) this paper theorizes the body as un-settled, creative, and simultaneously re-drawn and renegotiated in a (sexual) encounter.

Next author featured in this issue, Sebastian De Line, in his engagement with Donna Haraway's feminist theory, takes the discussions on trans materiality in yet another direction. While reading Donna Haraway's book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kinship in the Chthulucene* (2016) from Indigenous and trans perspectives, De Line draws on Indigenous thinkers such as Leroy Little Bear, Gregory Cajete, and Winona LaDuke, among others, to point to non-Western, more sustainable and kinder ways of relating to human and nonhuman beings around us. At the same time, by thinking with Indigenous ontologies and ways of forming relationships, De Line shows how these can support a different paradigm of thinking about trans life.

One of the thematic threads that reverberates through many of this volume's contributions are questions of knowledge production, the power over who gets to define trans bodies and lives, and resistance. While De Line shows the invisibilisation and/or appropriation of Indigenous knowledges, including in feminist theory, David Azul in an experimental fictocritical essay looks at the materiality of voice and trans speaking. Azul investigates the violence of gendering speech acts ("It's a girl!"/"It's a boy!"), audibility as regulated by phonetics (the science of speech sounds) and speech-language pathology, looking at the conditions of being heard. Azul asks: "How to imagine ever coming to voice if one is unable to recognize oneself in the sex category to which one has been allocated at birth and if embodying an unambiguously female or male gender is widely regarded as a necessary precondition for the adoption of a subject position and consequently any form of 'human' (rather than 'non-human' or 'monstrous') expression?" (Azul in this volume). Against the violence that renders trans bodies "speech-less" or inaudible, Azul experiments with other modes of speaking, also in the context of what is considered "legitimate" speaking in an academic knowledge production. In a similar vein, Eric Llaveria Caselles in "Dismantling the Transgender Brain" critically inspects the binary system projected onto brains of trans individuals in neuro-scientific research, challenging the existing – seemingly "objective" and "apolitical" – systems of knowledge production in science, and calling for holding scientists accountable.

In the last part of this volume, our contributors Joyce Gloria Floyd, and Robin McDonald and Dan Vena encourage us to imagine and think with queer creatures – those that in their crossing of the boundaries between human/nonhuman, organic/inorganic, fantastic/real, fleshed/wax challenge the binary system that categorises the body.

We, as editorial team, ourselves have been deeply transformed by the very experience of putting this issue together. We experienced it as the emergence of a material platform of inspiring trans-centered cooperations, challenging (political and often painful) decisions regarding selection of contributions, self-reflection on our different positionings, and a constant re-checking of our accountability practices (on our part). In particular, we felt empowered by the possibility to involve and prioritize trans and trans-sensitive perspectives as an integral constituent of the reviewing process itself, rather than disseminating articles with a trans topic to be assessed by objective and disembodied knowledge gatekeepers behind the scenes. We feel thankful towards the authors, artists and reviewers for their individual and collective work that made it possible to compile this issue, a work of trans knowledge, and most of all, a work of trans care. We hope that essays collected here will inspire readers to reflect on trans materiality as a work of transformation – of bodies of humans and bodies of knowledge, of discourses and practices, organizational processes and realities, in academia and beyond.

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Revisiting the "Wildcat Strike in the Gender Factory": Material Effects of Classification

j. vreer verkerke

ABSTRACT: Taking up a central metaphor of "the wildcat strike in the gender factory" from Dwight Billings and Thomas Urban's formative 1982 article "The Sociomedical Construction of Transsexualism: An Interpretation and Critique," I trace how trans*[1] lives are tied in with law and medicine, and how psycho-medical classifications affect material lives of trans* people. I question several core elements of contemporary gatekeeping to trans* healthcare. Next, I describe the material effects that classification discourse and medical practice have on the history and future of gender diversity. I argue that classifications serve among other things as a means to limit and control various genders and bodies. In the last part, I take a closer look on the struggle for liberation from these shackles. While Billings and Urban see the trans* phenomenon as a "wildcat strike in the gender factory," resisting imposed gender categories, this essay explores how prophetic the authors were.

KEYWORDS: transgender, depathologisation, classification, medicine.

AUTHOR NOTE: j. vreer verkerke is a longtime trans* and socialist activist who founded several trans* collectives, such as *The Noodles*, *Principle 17* for the right to the highest attainable standard of trans* health. Vreer uses they/them/their or que/que/que's as pronouns. Through *Principle 17* que works on a human rights based trans* health care in the Netherlands, where que lives. They are a member of *Transgender Europe's Steering Committee* and form part of GATE's civil society expert group on ICD reform. Que's piece contains their own opinion. You can reach que through e-mail at vreerwerk@xs4all.nl.

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Marxist (Marx & Engels, 1845) and feminist (Haraway, 1988) praxis recommends the author to position themselves and acknowledge how they situate their knowledge production practices. I embody the position of a longtime trans* and socialist activist who founded several trans* collectives in the Netherlands, such as *The Noodles* and *Principle 17,* to fight for the right to the highest attainable standard of trans* health. My agenda here is to tell a story that shows how classification means pathologisation of trans* identities, of identities *tout court;* how it affects trans* people; and how systems that deem them incapable or undesirable for decisional autonomy are detrimental to the right to life itself.

The Beginning

The history of modern transgender presence in the geopolitical Western world is considered to start in late 19th century. In 1897, a physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld founded the *Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee* (The Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, *WhK*) in Berlin, today considered the first LGBT advocacy group in the (Western) world (see: Lauritzen and Thorstadt, 1995). In *Transvestites* Hirschfeld describes his first "cases," he was also involved in the first transgender surgery – on Dora Richter, in 1931, in Berlin (Meyerowitz, 2002, p. 21). In those days the difference between trans* and homosexual was not yet canonized. In 1966, Harry Benjamin, Hirschfeld's colleague at WhK, authored *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966), that for years functioned as the "Bible for Transsexuality." Outside the Western world, gender diversity (that only from 19th century became fully binary) is known to have been recognised already for ages, with well-known examples like the South Asian *hijras*, pre-Columbian *travestis* in Latin America, *shaman* in North East Asia (see e.g. Feinberg, 1996). In many places, these non-binary gender systems were destroyed with the arrival of settler-colonizers. Philosopher Giuseppe Campuzano (2008) shows for Peru how pre-columbian genders disappeared through colonialism. Their destruction started already in the 16th century and was witnessed by Quechua nobleman Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala (1978), who famously chronicled colonial violence inflicted on the indigenous peoples in the Andes. Similarly, contemporary decolonial philosopher María Lugones (2008) argues in *Heterosexualism and the Modern Colonial Gender System* how gender structures of the Yoruba in Nigeria and Native American tribes were subordinated by Western practices (p.196).

In many geographical contexts trans* people experience violence. In modern times, this continues in many places as evidenced by the "Trans Murder Monitoring Project," issued by Transgender Europe (TGEU), a non-governmental organization advocating trans*gender and intersex rights.[2] In Europe, Turkey and Italy take the lead with respectively 43 and 36 killings since 2009, in the USA around 20 mostly trans* women of colour get killed yearly (see e.g. Kellaway & Brydum 2015; Advocate.com Editors 2016). There is no safe place for trans* people. Transphobia exists even among left wing and feminist organisations and theorists. One hugely important factor behind this is the Western classification system, as this essay will show. A formative article by Billings and Urban (1982) conceptualised trans* people's existence as a "wildcat strike in the gender factory" (p. 282), and equaled trans* people's refusal to continue living their assigned gender or in an unaltered body, to a strike that is neither authorised nor legal, opposing the production of gender binary. I explore how far they were right.

Classifications

In this section I will explain what kind of classifications are imposed on the bodies of trans* people. The process of medically assisted gender transition is governed by two complementary classifications. The first one is the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual for Mental Health Disorders* (DSM), currently in its 5th edition (APA, 2013). Issued by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), DSM departs from a North American perspective. The DSM is in origin a American psychiatric manual and is rooted in the mores of US practitioners, though now with a more international team of experts. As the medical discipline, and psychiatry in particular, is very influential on what we think moves and ails us, we are considered psychiatric subjects. The second classification, with more authority worldwide, is the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* (ICD, 1993) issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) that in essence is a human rights organization and a member of the United Nations family. The current ICD version is ICD-10, with ICD-11 in beta stage.[3] The two classifications are different in aim and scope. The DSM is meant for psychiatry and the ICD is targeted at the whole medical field and contains far more somatic diagnoses than psychiatric. The character of the DSM is clearly helping with diagnosis, while only the Clinical Modification of the

ICD (ICD-CM) is meant for that, the ICD, as a classification, is mostly meant for morbidity and mortality statistics.

When looking at the two classifications, positive changes are visible. The current version of the DSM employs the word "gender" instead of "sex" and opts for "gender dysphoria" instead of "gender identity disorder." These choices in nomenclature remain problematic as sex characteristics, corporeal/bodily phenomena that are not considered to have unequivocal influence on gender development, are still included in the DSM (Karkazis, 2000, pp. 47–62). The term "gender identity disorder" indicated that trans* identity itself is problematic, while "gender dysphoria" focuses on the issues people may have while living a trans* life. It seems that it was a close call that "gender incongruence" – a term preferred by many trans* activists – did not end up as the term of preference. The ICD is still in beta version for the coming edition, but chooses "gender incongruence" and more importantly, we also expect the new terminology to appear in a non-psychiatry related chapter about sexuality-related issues.

A psychiatric gatekeeping to access trans* health, often required on the basis of the classification, can be relatively swift, comprising a few sessions with a psychologist, to very intense and upsetting through a required stay of six weeks in a psychiatric ward, as has been the case in Ukraine[4] and Belarus. France still requires health care recipients to see psychiatrists and endocrinologists who display little understanding and sensitivity towards trans* people and their needs. Denmark healthcare-wise also counts among the most regressive systems in Europe, notwithstanding the legal change made.[5] Where some (mostly high-income) countries have simplified the legal gender recognition procedures, the majority of countries have no provision in gender identity recognition at all. Furthermore, their trans* and gender diverse inhabitants live in daily fear of discrimination and violence.

Trans* entanglements

When looking at legal changes towards fully free and self-determined gender change, it's important to keep in mind that the healthcare and legal recognition are tied-in together. Most places offering legal gender recognition require drastic medical interventions, like castration, as criteria for approval. Just a few countries

disentangled this tie-in: Argentina, Malta, Ireland, Norway, and Denmark. Only the first two of them have also depathologized the access to transition care itself. Everywhere else, the requirements for legal change are mental health interventions and/or as full as possible physical approximation of the body to that of "the other sex;" underlaid by a genital focus of the clinic. In 2013, this interdependence was affirmed by the UN as "tantamount to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (United Nations Human Rights Council, par. 78). This is a good example illustrating that, despite the fact that rights-based discourse has its problems such as its top-down workings and its belonging to a liberal worldview, using human rights as the force of transformation is currently an effective tool.

Overall, basic tenets of medicine and psychiatry around gender, however shifting and changing, are still considered valid; genders may change to previously unfathomed diversity, sex however remains discrete and where not, it is diagnosed as a disorder of sex development. This is the rationale why sex characteristics and gender incongruence are going into one chapter in ICD-11. Gender is diverse, but sex must be fixed, as the basis of the psycho-medical worldview is to rest untouched. This way even the effects of declassification are limited, until also gender registration itself becomes irrelevant.

According to the United Nations, everyone has a right to the highest attainable standard of health (Preamble of the WHO Constitution, CESCR art. 12, GC 14, GC 20). This applies indiscriminately, with "only" economic development as a limiting factor. This includes health care related to gender transition. For trans* people, however, this right is undermined with many restricting procedures. In most countries that follow DSM, ICD, and/or the World Professional Association for Transgender Health's (WPATH) *Standards of Care* (SOC, version 7 is current) having a referral letter that states conformity with DSM-code 302.85 ("Gender Identity Disorder in Adolescents or Adults") or ICD-10 code F64.0 ("Transsexualism"), is a requirement before accessing gender transition related healthcare. That, in turn, constitutes a precondition to access legal recognition. In practice, often there is no right to health care for trans* people, but an obligation to undergo medical procedures in order to be able to change one's gender marker on a passport or birth certificate.

Available gender transition procedures are mostly provided against a strong psycho-medical gatekeeping system. A psychiatrist first evaluates if the candidate complies with the diagnostic criteria for "gender identity disorder" or "gender dys-

phoria." These are, among others, based on suffering caused by "incongruence" between one's experienced gender and assigned gender (DSM-5 in: IFGE, n.d.). Because of these requirements in psychiatric or medical classifications, no one passes directly to a medical professional for access to hormones or surgeries. Also, not everywhere where there is a requirement of medical treatment, the resources to do that, such as a team of qualified professionals, are available. This way classifications, medical opinions and social norms become a warren of requirements to respond to.

An ontological fight for rights and agency

J. R. Latham (2016) signals in *Making and Treating Trans Problems* that the fight for trans* respect is also an ontological fight. Behind this statement lays a different idea about the production of reality. It is not the commonsense realism that assumes reality is objectively knowable and independent of the observer, but the idea that methods also make realities (Law, 2004 in: Latham, 2016), brought forward by scholars such as Bruno Latour, Annemarie Mol, or John Law. It matters how you see the world to define realities. According to Law reality is "not independent of the apparatuses that produce reports of reality" (2004, p. 31). Latham writes, "the systems designed to treat trans patients reiterate a specific trans ontology and trajectory of treatment […] that does not reflect how many trans people experience their bodies and lives" (p.2). Latham argues that transsexuality, the psycho-medically defined sub-identity of transgender that is eligible for medical assistance, is produced by precisely the medical process, while it is assumed to precede intervention (Latham 2016, p.2). Medical interventions are based on politics that are opposed to this different ontology, of how trans* people imagine their lives, bodies and histories; one that is growingly rooted in autonomy and agency, stimulated by emancipation and activism as we will see towards the end of this essay.

Confronting the dominant idea, expressed by Selvaggi and Giordano in "Aesthetic Plastic Surgery," that trans patients seeking gender confirmation surgery are clearly different from cisgender patients and need extra care, Latham examines "how clinical practices act in the making of trans realities, foreclosing particular iterations of what transexuality (sic.) could be" (p.1). Latham dissects the assump-

tions and the reasoning of Selvaggi and Giordano as exemplary for mainstream reasoning. They use the main principles for medical intervention precisely to create trans people as a separate category. Riki Wilchins would call their attitude *genderpathophilia* (Wilchins, 1997, p. 225), an obsessive need to pathologize any kind of gender behavior that makes society feel uncomfortable. Latham shows how people with different gender identifications and/or expressions are treated differently from cisnormative population when seeking the same kind of health care interventions they may need: hormone replacement therapy, plastic surgery, facial feminization surgery (FFS), or genital surgeries. Morgan (2015), in "Self-determining legal gender: transgender right, or wrong?," shows that medical professionals in Ireland and the UK also assume trans people need protection against delusions.

Intersex and trans* activist Mauro Cabral summarizes the strong entanglement of health classifications and legal gender recognition by saying that, on the one hand, the codifying of trans* identities and experiences in diagnostic terms confines them to a psychiatric ontology whose effects on life are negative – effects that do not only constitute trans* persons as less, but that also decidedly contribute to an institutionalized and normative reproduction of gender stereotypes. On the other hand, the same codification presents itself – and, in many cases, is also defended by these same trans* people – as a way to access rights. Particularly the right to surgically modify the sexed body and to the right of legal gender recognition (Cabral in: Suess Schwend 2015, p. 418).

Material effects of pathological classification

Most literature on the effects of pathologization and mental health classifications concentrates on psychological effects thereof, minority stress, lack of wellbeing and the effects of medical treatment (such as e.g. hormonal effects on the body). Less is known from a sociological angle, how well people manage on the material, economic level and in labour market. Even less research is done on how this is connected with the idea that mental health classification of difference sets people back in society.

Pathological classification has very tangible material effects on trans* people. The first effect of identity disorder classification is stigmatization. Some people find the diagnosis comforting as they now have a recognition that what they expe-

rience is "real" somehow, that they are transsexual. Others refuse classifications, opposing the pathologization of trans* experiences overall. However, in both cases, they are all affected by discrimination and marginalisation, insofar as they are classified as having gender dysphoria.

Rampant discrimination and violence have always affected trans* people, but the psychiatric stigma adds an important new element to it (Cabral, 2016; Suess Schwend, 2016; Winter et al., 2015). As with homosexuality, trans* has not always been a psychiatric category. Homosexuality entered the DSM in 1952 and after a fierce struggle by activists and professionals it disappeared in 1974. However, in that same edition it was trans issues which entered the DSM. While scholars have shown how this is not a matter of causality (e.g. Zucker and Spitzer, 2005), it is clear that in both cases gender normativity is the common theme that brings them into the DSM and ICD (Valentine, 2007; Bernini, 2014). The DSM and ICD strengthen the stigma by confirming that trans* people have psychiatric mental health issues connected to their experience of gender. This fuels transphobic stereotypes that get picked up by media and popular culture: the stigma of a "man in women's clothes"; and, to a lesser extent, "women dressed up as men" highers the risk of trans* people being outlawed, refused a house, a job, or education. It also justifies violence, very often from police and security functionaries. Reported killings of trans* people keep on rising. According to TGEU's Trans Murder Monitoring project (TGEU, 2016), we witness over 275 victims a year. For example the UK scores 65% on discrimination experience in the previous year (FRA, 2015, p. 21, p. 24).

The material effects of pathological classifications should be understood in intersection with other dimensions of discrimination: the lack of legal gender recognition that would enable trans* and gender diverse people to change their gender marker; the absence of regulations that protect trans* people from violence, discrimination, and even murder; and the inability to access affordable health care (both general and transition related) lead to socio-economic setbacks (NCTE, p. 125).

Another very important effect that pathological classification has is that it only allows for the production of certain bodies. The biopolitical effect of legitimation acknowledges only certain identities, for instance those labeled as "transsexual." Therefore, other non-normative identities and bodies are delegitimised, declined recognition. In a system that upholds the biologistic notion of only two "sexes,"

all sex/gender variances that diverge from it are exceptions to the rule, at best. In the DSM-5, and in discussions around the ICD-11 version, other genders are mentioned, but they remain an afterthought. Non-binary genders are still waiting in the wings to be "recognized."

Nowadays non-binary trans* people have to go through intensive psychiatric evaluation for having a non-normative gender identity before being able to access health care (if any). This is not only a human rights violation,[6] but it has strong material and psychological effects on people. However, although recognition for all trans* people is important, this cannot happen completely within a stigmatising framework such as the psychiatric diagnosis.

Resistance is fruitful

"The wildcat strike in the gender factory" has brought some positive results. The vision of the wildcat strike, as described by Billings and Urban, is that the marginalised who are a product of that same system would autonomously rise to overthrow its medico-capitalist ways of producing bodies and identities. Like activist workers, trans* people have organized, and still keep organizing, to fight the "class struggle of gender." Years of activism have led to change in attitudes and legislations, although we need to add that these changes are not universally good and they do not work in the same way for different groups. As we saw earlier, advocacy and activism have led to changes in DSM and ICD and institutional practices such as the UN appointing an Independent Expert for "Sexual orientation and gender identity" (SOGI) issues, stepping up for intersex children's rights, or Argentina adopting in 2012 the legal gender recognition law that is still considered the Gold Standard for trans* rights.

Protests against pathologization really took off from the change process from DSM-4 to DSM-5, that ended in 2013. In this process, the definition changed from gender identity disorder (making the identity disordered) to gender dysphoria that puts more emphasis on the problem, namely "dysphoria," one has while being trans*. The diagnostic criteria have not changed much, and they remain rooted in universalised and naturalised Western understandings of gender roles, e.g. strictly gendered use of dolls or cars (needless to say, trans* activists react bewildered to this criterion). Despite all this, this shift in nomenclature can be meaningful in some more conservative settings.

The DSM has provoked resistance in trans*communities. The pro-depathologisation movement is an international movement. In their dissertation, Amets Suess Schwend (2015) focuses on the "Stop Trans Pathologisation" (STP) campaign, charting how multiple ways of resistance have formed in different places. Some examples of this resistance are the campaigns "L'autèntica malaltia és la transfòbia" (The real sickness is transphobia; that adopts a strategy of reversing the gaze), "Ni hombres, ni mujeres, el binarismo nos enferma" (not men not women, the binary makes us sick; criticism of a dichotomous system), "Por el placer de ser trans" (for the joy of being trans; about creating happy narratives). In the Netherlands continuing education through social media by trans* activists and the push towards legal change are slowly breaking the cultural hegemony of transphobic doctors.

Activists struggling for freedom and rising consciousness advocate for the recognition that trans* identities are valid in and of themselves and not through pathologization. The struggle involves more and more people with different non-normative identities. This struggle has centered, among other aspects, on showing that the dominant ideas in the medical profession are the product of heteronormative prejudices that do no justice to our lives. In result, the attitudes of professionals are slowly changing, making them consider different frameworks. By refusing for the psychiatric diagnosis to have the last say, this struggle creates room for wider visibility of different identities. Through the emancipation that is connected with the trans* movement, the power held by classifications and diagnosis is visibilized as a disciplining power that affects materially the lives of trans* people. Resistance proves to be fruitful. We are getting closer and closer to a non psycho-pathologising understanding of the ways in which access to health care should be provided to trans* and gender diverse people. The actions, oppositions and critiques to the medical committees that have the power to update relevant texts such as the DSM have contributed to this change, as Susan Stryker (2006) describes in her "Words to Victor Frankenstein" in relation to the protest action at the APA meeting. Also human rights declarations and activism are pacing the way to relevant change. For example Transgender Europe (TGEU), Global Action for Trans Equality (GATE), International Campaign to Stop Trans Pathologization (STP), Centre of Excellence for Transgender Health (COE), European Union, United Nations; as is also a growing corpus of scientific literature that is more aware of trans* per-

spectives (see: *The Lancet,* series "Transgender health", June 2016). This change is a contentious affair that should not be left to the medical discipline alone.

This strike is ours!

In this essay, I have given a short overview of how trans* and gender diverse people have for a long time been considered mentally disordered and thus their experiences have been forced into a psychiatric corset. Coinciding with a rising self-consciousness, a new militant trans* movement formed and the update of the DSM classification was taken as a moment to get involved and act up for access and availability of gender transition health care. Through multi-tier action the influence of this movement grows exponentially and can no longer be ignored.

Billings and Urban in their article express deep distrust towards the medical establishment and protest against transgender surgery as a solution for social discomfort. They reproach trans* people that they don't firmly and univocally reject the gender binary and fail to recognize that trans* people are as much of a product of heteronormative society as anyone else. But who are they to call for trans* disobedience? It's not their strike. Their myopic approach keeps heteronormative society blame-free, with contemporary researchers and practitioners still thinking that trans* people are "special" or suffer from a certain "disorder." Billings's and Urban's blaming of trans* people is counterproductive, that is why in this essay I intercept the metaphor central to their paper and show its subversive potential. The wildcat strike in gender factory continues: while a disentanglement of legal recognition and medical assistance is one important aspect of it, without a model of informed consent granting us our agency, we are still a long way from home. Therefore, a unified action pressuring states and international bodies to adapt their laws and regulations coupled with the work of reclaiming our agency, will in the end lead to a societal transformation and get us there.

Endnotes

1 Trans*, with asterisk, intends to include all forms of gender diversity on their own right. On its origins, see: Cabral, 2009, p. 14.

2 See: Trans Murder Monitoring (n.d.); what is registered is considered only the tip of the iceberg as in many areas violence against trans*people is significantly underreported.

[3] Approval is foreseen for June 2018, at the next World Health Organization assembly.

[4] In 2017, Ukraine abolished the infamous Order 60 regulating access to trans-related health that imposed a mandatory 20–45 days of psychiatric internment. It remains to be seen how the updated rules will be implemented and what effect they will have.

[5] Even though Denmark replaced the gender identity disorder criteria in the national classification of diseases with very friendly codes, medical practice is not prone to change yet.

[6] It concerns most clearly The Yogyakarta Principle 18 on freedom from medical abuses – Yogyakarta Principles being a document concerning human rights in the areas of sexual orientation and gender identity prepared in 2006 by a distinguished group of international human rights experts in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Principle 18 reads: "No person may be forced to undergo any form of medical or psychological treatment, procedure, testing, or be confined to a medical facility, based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Notwithstanding any classifications to the contrary, a person's sexual orientation and gender identity are not, in and of themselves, medical conditions and are not to be treated, cured or suppressed" (Yogyakarta Principles 2007).

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Transition as Decreation: A Transfeminist Phenomenology of Mixed/Queer Orientation

Jacob R. Lau

ABSTRACT: This phenomenological autoethnographic account reflects on moments from the first five years of the author's transition from female-to-male while attending UC Berkeley and Harvard Divinity School. Lau unpacks the affects of racialization and sexualization on his medicalized mixed race trans male body. He meditates extensively on the relationship between loss of his body's sedimented citational history to visibility and disorientation during transition by engaging with Anne Carson's concept of decreation, and Sara Ahmed's work on mixed genealogies and queer orientations. By thinking through transition as decreative rather than purely generative and linear, Lau demonstrates that social and medical transition unearth nonlinear histories of sedimented acts on queer of color bodies. Lau also makes the argument for extending Ahmed's concept of "seeing slantwise" as a queer orientation pertaining to queer sexualities and mixed race genealogies to Asian American trans identity and experience. More than a singular affect grounded in presentism (understanding the current moment as only what is "eternal" and "real"), seeing slantwise opens up mixed trans bodies to nonlinear ways of organizing and feeling out their embodied histories that does not adhere to cisnormative time.

KEYWORDS: phenomenology, Trans of Color critique, Critical Mixed Race Studies, racialized masculinities, cisnormative time.

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Decreation is an undoing of the creature in us – the creature enclosed in self and defined by self. But to undo self one must move through self, to the very inside of its definition. – Anne Carson

In her 2006 work *Queer Phenomenology* Sara Ahmed defines queer orientations as "those that put within reach bodies that are unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy. Queer orientations might be those that don't line up, which by seeing the world 'slantwise' allow other objects to come into view" (2006, p. 107). While Ahmed is talking specifically about sexual orientation and same-sex desire I think that the desire to transition from the sex and gender one is assigned at birth to a different gender and/or sex would also align with a "slantwise" view of conventional genealogy. I interpret conventional genealogy as not only blood kin and family described by Ahmed, but those sets of cisnormative embodied expectations and the sexual identity categories that are based off of the assumption of one's unchanging sex and gender. To see the world slantwise is then to feel out of alignment not only with heteronormative temporalities, and "whiteness as a straightening device," which place blood ties at the center of the orientating table, it is also to feel out of cisnormative time within the racially and gender sedimented body (Ahmed, 2006, p. 121). What happens when the supposedly "unreachable bodies" within conventional genealogy that come into view become one's own? What does seeing slantwise feel like and do?

In this essay, I will explore the disorienting process of feeling mixed through simultaneous becoming, decreation, and seeing slantwise that was/is my gender transition from female to male, particularly focusing on affective effects from experiences during the first five years of my transition.[1] Throughout this article I will utilize Ahmed's concepts of dis- and re-orientation through negation, as well

as mixed genealogies and orientations. What Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* lends traditions of looking to negativity in queer studies is a mode of gender embodiment firmly shaped and located in the racialized and sexualized social field through interrelational encounters that assume whiteness and heteronormativity. When these assumptions are placed on queer and/or people of color, these bodies fall out of alignment, and demonstrate the normative limits of spaces historically steeped in whiteness and/or heterosexism (even when these spaces proclaim their investment in diversity, equality, and postracial politics). I argue that queer and trans of color bodies, and particularly bodies in transition, also demonstrate a differential and nonlinear kind of citational temporality primarily through affects that eject the body out-of-time within queer (white) spaces, the result of which is continual partial and misrecognition. Transition occurs through an affective dis- and re-orientation within the lineage of mixed genealogies and queer orientations.

Anne Carson's concept of decreation will also be an accompanying concept throughout this piece. Barrowed from the Christian mystic Simone Weil, the word decreation is, "a neologism to which [Weil] did not give an exact definition nor a consistent spelling" (Carson 2005, p. 167). Carson describes decreation as a project of "an undoing of the creature enclosed in-self and defined by self" (2005, p. 179). While Weil understood the undoing of the creature in us as a means for making way for the divine, I understand the unmaking of the creature in-self as an apt metaphor for transition (as opposed to the common cultural narrative of trans people 'becoming our true selves'). Decreation as described by Weil and interpreted and articulated by Carson centralizes the contradictions of a project of unmaking self through writing about a becoming self. This is a contradiction I am also taking up by writing about a transition in which I experienced something akin to loss through an articulation, that is much less than mastery and truth. Understanding loss in my mixed race transmasculine transition as a decreation makes space for creation and becoming; it allows for seeing slantwise. Simultaneously, the sedimentation of material history of a body is never entirely lost and if read through a trans affirmative feminist lens, this puts pressure on cisnormative assumptions of the racialized and sexualized body. In her field launching essay *The Empire Strikes Back*, Sandy Stone made the argument that posttranssexual narratives should refuse leaving behind a trans gender history for stealthy living amongst cis people, as this would never challenge the cisnormative narratives gatekeeping transpeople's

livelihoods (1987, p. 232). Instead Stone insisted on thinking transgender through new genres of narratology. She says:

> transsexuals must take responsibility for *all* of their history, to begin to rearticulate their lives not as a series of erasures in the service of a species of feminism conceived from within a traditional frame, but as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body. (Stone: 1987, p. 232)

I must make clear that I am not trying to turn the pains of loss into something entirely productive, but to situate a reading of my transition as decreative act that does not disappear loss or embodied history; rather it opens the subjects to the complications and contradictions of disorientation. Making strange bedfellows between Carson's poetic literary criticism in *Decreation* and Ahmed's queering of phenomenology allows for my transition to be understood through feeling mixed and seeing slantwise as an agential undoing of my fraught relationships to sexual, and racial categories based on the assumption of sex being equivalent to gender.

Allowing for an articulation of my background, a mixed racial and gender history operating simultaneously within and outside of the presentism of everyday social interactions, dis- and re-orientation describe the interface between social, legal, medical fields and my embodied subjectivity and identities. The continual visual misalignment of my body to the sexual, racial, and class categories to which I belonged effected the extent of reach for my often secret desires and hidden identity. These readings of my body pigeonholed me into time and space that was neither queer (in regards to embodiment) nor mixed. The temporal concept of presentism is made most famous by Saint Augustine of Hippo. In Book XI of his autobiographical *Confessions*, Augustine argues that only the current moment is "real" and "eternal," literally cut off from both the past and future (Augustine, 2002, 11.17.22). For the first two years of my transition I was subject to presentism's temporal logic in everyday interactions; I was read as existing only within the time of the event of that particular encounter. As such it was through the invisibility of my slantwise viewpoint, my continuously misread mixed genealogy, and oft unassumed trans history inscribed in and on my mixed trans body during the first two years of transition that I was forcibly realigned to a continuous mixed/queer

orientation of personal unknowing, undoing, and unlearning. My experience of decreation shall become clearer through recalled interactions within marked queer spaces, everyday encounters with other people (both white and of color), and in a markedly changed relationship with a dog.

For a mixed race trans man working within the field of Women and Gender Studies like myself, who from birth locates himself in a queer line of class and racial descent through blood heritage, my racial, sexual and gender subjectivity has been and often still is constantly questioned and repositioned. I understand my mixed race and heritage background as non-normative partially through the history of the U.S. nation state's anxieties and exclusion of Chinese immigrants based off of characterizations of sexual deviance and long standing discourses of anti-miscegenation. Legal scholar Leti Volpp among other critical race theorists, discusses how anti-Chinese miscegenation laws in the United States regulating interracial intimacy between white and Chinese people characterized Chinese people as sexually deviant and morally lax beginning with the Page Law's explicit exclusion of Asian Women (characterizing them as prostitutes) in 1875 (2006, p.410–11). The connection between nonnormative sexuality and Chineseness is drawn out further by queer and mixed heritage scholar Wei Ming Daritois, who explicitly connects historical scientific and political discourses of interracial intimacy and mixed heritage children to racial queerness. Daritois writes, "In the sense of being outside of normative sexuality, the sexuality of Chinese was deemed 'queer' – specifically because of their race. Thus being able to determine or define someone's 'race' is the foundation of the power of the state to prevent racially 'queer' or 'transgressive' sexuality" (Daritois, 2007). As explained by Daritois, the determinative power of naming another subject's race, sexuality, and gender becomes a gatekeeping mechanism reinscribing the boundaries of normative sexuality and its accompanying racialized and gendered dimensions. Because of this looking outside the determinative strategies and institutions of the state has always been a cornerstone of queer and trans of color critique. Finding itself at the radical intersections of Ethnic, Gender and Sexuality Studies, queer and trans of color critique is also where I find this essay.

My place within both my chosen field in academia and other institutions was never more in question than during my first two years of hormonal transition. As was common for an earlier generation of transmasculine scholars in Women's and

Gender Studies, I was often asked what a "nice young man was doing in Women's Studies." I grew increasingly frustrated when, upon learning that I was assigned female at birth, my interlocutors would smile as if my nonconsensual sex and gender assignment explained this mystery (Because of course I was a feminist, I had been a girl!). Not only did this mentality traffic in some pretty hard transmisogyny, sex and gender essentialism, it flattened the broad range of types of feminisms and gender analyses from which the field is and has been approached. As my medical, and legal transition proceeded and these interactions became more and more common. I found myself increasingly reflecting on the ways my racialized gender history was being disappeared along with all of the sexual cultural touchstones I used to orient myself within LGBTQ spaces. My transmasculinity was disorienting me to the fields in which I came to know myself (academic, legal, medical, LGBQ communal, everyday public space), and in turn I was disorienting to the people making up those fields. Unlearning the ways and means through which I positioned myself within and through communities that were at the same time constituting my sociality, actually meant aiding and challenging assumptions about the history of my embodiment. I had already been doing this for years with my race, and to some extent my gender. However, during this period any social interaction became an oft unwanted detangling and reconstitution of the history of my gendered, racialized, and sexualized body unpacking white cisnormative, and heteronormative assumptions, stemming from acute moments of realizing that someone is addressing you as someone who is not quite you. Being disoriented means you are affectively ejected out of social space, or more accurately feel beside yourself, feel the weight of scrutiny, and suddenly have a lot of explaining to do.

If transgender may be thought of as an interdependent term birthed through relationality as J. Jack Halberstam suggests in "Unlosing Brandon" from *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* then, "it describes not simply an identity but a relation between people, within a community, or within intimate bonds" (2005, p. 49). I would add to Halberstam's understanding of transgender as a relation between people that the trans body materializes through intimate and communal bonds, and through the sedimentation of being gendered, racialized, and sexualized differently in non-intimate everyday contacts. The contingency of historical hailings in the everyday are especially shaping for trans people of color. My trans male body is made up and dependent on a history of sedimented hailing;

being socially and medically cited first as "she" and currently "he" gendering me about in the world.

During the first summer of my hormone therapy some of these layers of pronouns were a welcome relief; others cited my gender transitiveness and history as female and resulted in my disorientation. Remaining within the structuring force of dualistic gendered language, my morphing body literally cited the incorporated history of my two adolescences. This ambiguity resulted in the confusion of passersby and made my maleness difficult to ascertain. In everyday interactions in classrooms, on the street, and in health centers and pharmacies, amongst cis lesbian, gay, and bi people as well as monoracial white and people of color, my Cantonese and white American identity was highlighted and reinterpreted as well as my orientation towards women through the social acknowledgement of my male gender identity. I found that the day(s) I became recognized as male, I became overtly racialized as not-White. But "what I was" racially was always up for speculation.

Ten autumns ago with my hormonal transition in full swing, I began to be read as an effeminate gay Asian cis man. If I passed as male at all. While I was occasionally mistakenly identified as a Polynesian woman (and called out on it), or a Latinx butch before transition, I found that during transition people, particularly men, were unafraid to call attention to my not-completely-white racial background on an almost daily basis. While Harvard Divinity School's largely white student body and administration embraced my trans identity, I found it frustrating that the LGBTIQ events at Harvard's schools were primarily lead by and aimed at wealthy, white gay cis men. In my interactions during meetings with queer leaders from Harvard's other graduate schools I found myself repeatedly fetishized by white gay men who would point out the "exotic Asian" features of my body.

> *He was just curious. At least that's what they all say. "What nice almond shaped eyes, you must be Japanese." I assured the white gay cis male head of JFK's (Harvard's School of Government) queer student organization that I wasn't. "No, and you know, I find that offensive." He didn't get the hint and proceeded along well worn territory. "You've got to be Japanese, I have a friend with exotic features who looks just like you." Anger flared up inside me, quickly replaced by fear. His eyes drifted downwards. Here it comes. "Are you legal?"*

I walked into what used to be Greg's Pizzeria in Berkeley my junior year at Cal and the two men working behind the counter asked me in Spanish how fluent I was. When I told them I only spoke a little, they seemed confused. Then it came, "Aren't you Mexican?" one of the men asked. "Chino" I said. They shook their heads. You never can tell. And even saying I am Chinese is only half of my racial background.

"Are you from China?" "Is your father from China?" "Are you from Brazil?" Random pedestrians will mistakenly inquire about my ethnicity through questioning my nationality on an almost daily basis around Cambridge or while riding the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA). The frequency I am asked these questions increases as I become regularly cited as male. Standing at 5'5" I am now well below average height for my gender, but am the exact same height as my Cantonese grandfather and perfectly fit the short Asian stereotype that my 5'7" father deals with on a daily basis. While occasionally asked if I was Hawaiian as a woman, people do not hold back their curiosity about my racial make up as a not-white male. I often wonder about this. What shielded people off before? Was it my tough butch dyke vibe? Am I now experiencing the social power of the stereotype of the effeminate Asian male? I know geographical location matters, UC Berkeley and the East Bay Area of Northern California is predominately Asian American with a sizable Latinx, African American and mixed population. In stark contrast I am an oddity, a lightly brown body in heavily white Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In an almost answer to those earlier ponderings…During the winter of my second year in UCLA's doctoral program I am waiting for a nighttime bus in Koreatown, when a black (and perhaps mixed) man who didn't appear much older than me approaches me. "Hey brother, what was your Dad?" I'm always more inclined to answer a person of color. "He is Cantonese, Chinese." "Do you speak Spanish?" I'm confused. "No." He chuckles and shakes his head, "So you're a white boy Latino. Too bad for your mom."

Mixed/queer genealogies such as mine involve both a becoming and decreating at once. Anne Carson describes the project of decreation as articulated initially by Simone Weil as a feeling of "joyless joy" and "an occasion…of exclusion and negation" (Carson, 2005, p. 170). An ecstatic bodily experience of undoing which

jettisons one outside the sense of a coherent and unified self, decreation calls up the material history of the past through the negative. Rather than destroying the self though, decreation signals a simultaneous opening toward a mysterious future. Like disorientation, decreation undoes the coherent sense of self through the feeling of being beside or outside of oneself. Importantly while both are grounded in the negative, decreation is a project, an act unmaking a subject by that subject, which opens one up to the happenstance of disorientation. In both negation is experienced through a generative loss, a becoming in the midst of exclusion and ejection.

In the racially mixed body, history runs forward and backward simultaneously. "A queer genealogy," Sara Ahmed writes, "would take the very 'affects' of mixing, or coming into contact with things that reside on different lines, as opening up new kinds of connection" (2006, p. 154–5). Far from comfortable, these new kinds of connection with(in) mixed bodies create an "unsettling effect" internally and externally at their arrival with unmarked white bodies, and mark the impossibility of a return via the experience of negation. Ahmed (2006, p. 155) describes this as a dis- and re-orientation:

> …the experience of negation, of being stopped or feeling out of place, of feeling uncomfortable at home, does not "stop" there. It is around such experiences that bodies gather, getting together, acting, refusing this inheritance of whiteness, refusing even the desire to follow that line. […] In other words, the collective anger about the orientation of the world around whiteness might reorientate our relation to whiteness.

The orientation around white cis male privilege within that Harvard queer meeting was epitomized by my interaction with the JFK representative. He as a white cis man could not only accurately interpret my body as Japanese and cis male, but by asking me if I was legal enacted a long standing colonial discourse of the young Asian bottom boy desiring domination and penetration by an older white gay man. Richard Fung (1991) discusses the ways in which orientalist optics function within White-Asian gay male racialized politics of eroticism in gay video porn in his classic article *Looking for my Penis*. In particular the long standing older white man, young "house boy" role, in which "the Asian man acts the role of the mythologized geisha

or 'the good wife' […] is one of the most persistent white fantasies about Asian men" (1991, p. 156) He elaborates that these oft commented upon, "self-conscious 'Oriental' signifiers are part and parcel of a colonial fantasy – and reality – that empowers one kind of gay man over another" (1991, p. 157).

Wilfully ignoring my insistence that I was not a Japanese gay cis man, my angry affective reaction to the JFK representative's unsettling comments reoriented me to the glaring absence of my embodied presence (as a mixed race early twenty-something trans man) within what might have been a "queer home" space. Remembering my inaccurate pre-transition racialized and gendered interaction at Greg's and the barrage of daily questions (and assumed answers) about my racial background only called into sharper relief the spectacle of my mixed race body. The sedimented memories of simultaneous mis-gendering, inaccurate racialization, and assumptions about my sexuality, recalled my bone deep anger about the "orientation of the world" around whiteness and cispatriarchy and its attendant inheritances and "desires to follow the line" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 155). I had to reorient how to articulate my positionality within spaces marked for certain bodies, become accustomed to the environmental effects undoing of the creature within myself, unknowing how my body would be signified by others.[2]

I realize that the quandary of rearticulating, and reorienting myself through writing about decreation and becoming lends itself to some internal contradictions. Carson describes the different moves Simone Weil, Marguerite Ponte, and Sappho take in "undergoing an experience of decreation" and participating in the paradoxical "writerly project" of describing it (Carson, 2005, p. 171; 179). She explains:

> [T]o be a writer is to construct a big, loud, shiny centre of self from which the writing is given voice and any claim to be intent on annihilating this self while still continuing to write and give voice to writing must involve the writer in some important acts of subterfuge or contradiction. (2005, p. 171)

Carson argues that rather than think of the contradiction of the act as undermining the writer's project of articulating decreation, one must allow for its necessary uses. She states, "to undo self one must move through self, to the very inside of its definition. We have nowhere else to start" (2005, p. 179). Unmaking and rearticu-

lating held past identities through the disorienting process of decreation will lead to some contradiction, but that is why it is the place to start. It is how the process of transitioning works. The affects of past identities are never quite disposed of, they follow us and resurface, are part of the creature within us, and learning how to feel and articulate them is part of transition as well. Perhaps the most contradictory affects in my transition in the nexus of my racial, gendered, and sexual self came through my fraught relationship with my previously held hapa tomboy identities.

Hapa, a Hawaiian term meaning half, was the way I described my Cantonese and Caucasian racial heritage growing up. When I was a skinny little tomboy playing kickball in my tender bare feet on the scorching blacktop of Mililani, Hawaii my Cantonese/Japanese cousins used to tease my siblings and I calling us "Hapa Haole[3]." Interestingly, they chose the appropriated Native term to mark us by our difference, our foreign whiteness instead of Pake, the Hawaiian term meaning Chinese. I wondered why it is a linguistic impossibility to be Hapa Pake Haole, it seemed paradoxical to pick one or the other. But that means of course one has to choose which racial signifier to precede the other after hapa. Often, when I would tell someone that I identified as hapa, and they found out what that means, I presented an additional disclaimer that I did not have Hawaiian heritage. Because I claimed a racial identity appropriating Hawaiian terminology, I problematically was seen as more legitimately Hawaiian then Cantonese. (This period of self-explaining and identifying lasted until college when hapa clubs and their resulting mixed Asian and white members were plentiful.)

When I choose mixedness as my racial identity, I do so with the history of understanding haole whiteness as other, because that was how I came to understand my difference from other Asian Americans. Like Ahmed, I understood that the question of "what are you?" when asked outside of my intimate communities is oriented around whiteness to straighten out the wrinkles in assumed monoracial normativity that mixed folks embody. Ahmed describes the ways white bodies fall into spaces because they align with the straight institutional and historical orientations of spaces. She extends this to the positivism of the agential "I can" in the field of phenomenology itself saying, "such a phenomenology, in other words, describes the ease with which the white body extends itself in the world through how it is orientated toward objects and others" (2006, p. 138). Ahmed says that, "If the mixed-race body wishes to be white (in the sense of being orientated 'around'

whiteness), it is also orientated toward whiteness as the object of desire. […] For not being white can also reorientate your relation to whiteness even if the 'not' might at first generate a negative impression" (2006, p. 146). Mixed genealogy allows for a slantwise view that makes certain bodies, desires, histories and identificatory losses, come into view; to me racial difference was initially understood as whiteness rather than Asian-ness. But of course within a larger society institutionally orientated around whiteness, mixedness becomes a point of continual contestation or reorientation to whiteness. The lines cross, merge and yet linguistically I must parse them out.

In the social, and embodied "crisis" of (in)visible mixedness, a body merging two problematically assumed disparate wholes, the gap between the times governing understanding and claiming racial, gender, and sexual identities, and the interpretation of the mixed and trans body through everyday continuous hailing becomes a crucial point of reorientation to a mixed orientation recalling a mixed genealogy. I could only understand my racialized gender and sexual orientation linearly in my body, that was and is how it is lived moment-by-moment. However, the temporal methods of understanding my identities and their relationship to my body, seemed to enter a different temporal schema when called into being by others. It was as though twenty different histories regulated through cisnormative understandings of sexuality and race were being read onto me and through me with each social interaction. "What are you?" seemed to become more of a question of "When are you?" by friends, family members and passerby alike. As in, "Where are you along in my imagined time of your transition?" "When are you going to get bottom surgery?" My body's temporality was already off course with whiteness, and now had moved into another timestream that cis people were trying to understand through their own orientating points of gender, sexual, class, and racialized history.

Ahmed describes multiple temporalities and relationships to time, through her descriptions of feeling out mixed orientations operating through mixed bodies. The seeming secrecy of a mixed genealogy "does not only take us back but points us toward the future" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 152). Hidden in the background of the mixed race body, reorientation to a mixed orientation relieves the mixed body of necessarily revealing the "what" of the often asked question "What are you?" by bridging the gap between lines. As Ahmed (2006, p. 153) details:

> A mixed orientation might even preserve the secrecy of the other side, as the "side" that is behind what we face, even at the very moment we turn around to face what is behind us. At the same time, being mixed offers more than one side from which to have an "angle" on the world. Inheritance does not always hold things in place but instead keeps open the space for new arrivals, for new objects, which have their own horizons. If inheritance means to receive and to possess, then it might also open up a gap between reception and possession.

The gap in which I received and possessed "Hapa" as a tomboy is the same space which offered me an opening to distil my experience of hormonal transition. This is not the same as saying processes of racialization were behind or before my masculinity, but rather the two have always already informed each other. Inheriting a mixed orientation allowed me a queer angle on my embodied arrival into physical maleness, and a place no male blood kin had gone before. It was this slantwise view that I inherited, and continued feeling out as my transition unfolded.

And yet the history of mixed race Asian Americans appropriating and possessing Indigenous Hawaiian racial identifications for a kind of queer pan-Asian mixed solidarity, is one replicating old Asian settler colonial narratives and practices in Hawaii. (This is also the side that is behind what I face, even as I turn back to write about what is behind me.) I learned this once I arrived at UCLA four years into my social and three years into my hormonal transition. Because of my reflections on the ways racialized gender shaped my transmasculinity, I could not ignore the ways in which I was what Reese Simpkins (2016) terms becoming-intersectional, not only through the materialization of gendered racial sexualization, but through a changing sedimentation of citational history. My claiming and disclaiming of the political, cultural, and social inheritance of hapa, like the inheritance of transmasculinity comes with the force of histories of dispossession, hegemonic whiteness, and cultural imperialism, even while both identificatory positionalities have been hailed as exceptionally postmodern and neoliberal.[4] This is what is meant by transition as decreation, a project doing/undoing what has constituted the self – including the losses and legacies of violence behind that self – by and through self, to the very heart of definition. What was in fact constituting a "you" has always meant the erasure and unmaking of someone else. This has continuously played out in the various modal structures of White and Asian settler colonialism and im-

perialism in Hawaii (economic, linguistic, educational, political), and the cultural, economic, and social capital of transmasculinity.

As Ahmed says, inheritance does not always hold things into place, it often widens the gap between reception and possession. Reese Simpkins argues that becoming-intersectional is, "an intersectional trans*feminist politics based on… process over positionality" a kind of dynamic phenomenological movement (what Simpkins terms "onto-epistem-ological production") grounded in the material body (Simpkins, 2016, p. 229). Shaking out the reorientation to identifications, objects, and others, what inheritances may open up is a dynamic relationship to the historical and material past on and through the body. But this dynamism, the move to affective process over positionality, is still felt against a linear understanding of bodily progress, and there are always losses…

> *I knew the moment it happened, that people might say the day I "truly become male" was the day Barney didn't recognize me. The three year old Cocker Spaniel I had helped housebreak during the fall of my senior year at UC Berkeley fled in terror as I knelt down and called out his name in my newly baritone voice. This was a complicated moment for me. Barney was terrified of cis men, so it was nice to see that four months of hormone therapy had erased some of my embodied "femaleness," all the way down to my scent. But on the other hand I felt that I no longer bore a trace of J's former queer female roommate, and in a way I felt that my interrelational history with Barney (the housebreaking, training, and bonding) had been erased. I was visiting J at her new house near the Oakland border in August after my first year at Harvard Divinity School, and while I still had not had top surgery and was socially recognized as male eighty percent of the time, I felt the only somatic difference testosterone had made was my voice drop an octave (and frustratingly break during every other word).*

Although I knew that I had not exchanged bodies or lives with someone else, there were moments over the first two years of my medical transition which felt that way. In fact, there are still moments where the paradox of loss through the becoming of transition with its reoriented relationships feel unbearable. This is how you know you are being decreated. You feel that "joyless joy" of mis/recognition by a being who did and did not know "you." It is not popular to talk about losing dur-

ing transition; we think about what we gain in terms of community, and what must be sacrificed is seen as what is necessary to constitute ourselves. There are enough transphobic narratives regulating our stories that try to incorporate loss into regretting transitioning (especially when hormones and/or surgery is involved). But I think what this actually does is force us to restructure our narratives into something understandable, positive, progressive, linear, and unqualifiably cisnormative. I find this limiting in emotional scope, antifeminist, racist, and transphobic. It is easy to focus on how trans people's gender is verbally constituted by others, and particularly the ways in which our gender is conferred onto our intelligible or unreadable bodies through "passing." But using "passing" uncritically (especially with the term's history in communities of color) bifurcates these temporally and affectively complex moments. This is how our bodies become unreachable within conventional genealogy (I am supposed to celebrate Barney not knowing me because then I "really am a man"), and when it is ourselves that come into view, we begin to start seeing slantwise in order to understand why I can feel out-of-time in that mis/recognition.

To see slantwise it is helpful to turn to what Judith Butler refers to as the subject's incorporated history. In "Performativity's Social Magic" Butler (1999, p. 119) critiques and comments on Bourdieu's notion of habitus and its relationship to the "objective field:"

> … the *habitus* presupposes the field from the start, and is itself composed of sedimented rituals framed and impelled by the structuring force of that field. Indeed, it seems that subject, insofar as it is necessarily embodied, and the body is itself the site of "incorporated history", is not set over and against an "objective" domain, but has that very "objectivity" incorporated as the formative condition of its very being.

The formative conditions of my being rendered and cited as a male subject necessitated my view already being structured by an objective field of masculinity dressing, walking and now hormonally incorporating male social cues into my body. As part of the objective domain making up my incorporated history, my relationship to Barney helped constitute the formative conditions of my transmasculinity. To be misrecognized during the moment of reintroduction, felt as though my self was

being split, or that I had taken on the life of someone else. If anything this encounter with a non-speaking subject spoke louder to me about loss of a complex gender history than being hailed by a random passerby in the street. The objective fear of a dog meant that something physical and social, but unspoken had been remade within me, and I was being framed and impelled by the structuring danger of a cis man.

As I anxiously moved in the world I was also resituating the field around me as a hormonally transitioning subject now being cited as female, now as male. Seeing slantwise allowed for loss to be felt as the decreation of a transspecies relationship inside of the resituated field. As my encounter with Barney demonstrated, the formative condition of my being a male subject also assumed an incorporated history that was not mine, denying my formative experiences as a female bodied and cited subject. Even while the sediment was settling around me and I was being confirmed in the gender I identified with I was losing the citational history of my gendered and cissexual past. Within the objective domain of the social, my queer incorporated history was becoming purely relegated to the realm of affect, felt through the lingering remembrances of past relationships, made invisible to the passerby, with my queer body hidden and bound beneath my clothing. I was becoming the gap between the lines, disoriented and mixed, decreated at the moment of re-creation.

There is always the moment I pause, syringe in hand, and realize how different things would be if I didn't inject 100mls of testosterone cypionate into my thigh every fourteen days. I know the masculinization of my body is dependent upon synthesized hormones suspended in sunflower seed oil, deployed into my bloodstream via a 1 cc syringe and purchased for a discounted ten dollars at CVS with my Harvard Student Health insurance. Without my student insurance a 50ml vial of testosterone cypionate would be upwards of eighty dollars or more. As a Harvard Student, not only do I have pharmacy discounts but access to a mental and primary health care team that specializes in gender identity and has written me letters for hormone and surgical therapy.

All these economic, educational, and medical privileges lead me to the moment I plunge that 25 gauge .65 inch needle into my sanitized thigh. Bleeding, I remove the needle quickly pulling up the epidermal layer which clings to the thin shaft of

metal. I wait for the now rapid changes testosterone brings to my body; increased hair on my back, legs, arms, face and stomach, thinning of the hair around my temples, the continued deepening of my voice, an increased libido as well as an ability to take on muscle, and the continued cessation of menses. As the visible markers of my female past recede into the background and my body becomes more accustomed to this bi-monthly ritual I cannot help feeling like the werewolf rapidly transforming with each new moon.

It is a tumultuous entry into manhood that I experience; I feel pain and loss on many levels even while I gain the advantages of becoming anonymously male. With facial hair comes outbreaks of acne, with the enlargement of my clitoris into a small phallus comes the desire to ejaculate that will never occur, with the desiring glance from my cis lover and surprising allowance of being openly affectionate in public comes the acknowledgement of being read as a straight couple and loss of queer visibility that has been integral to my identity. I often find myself situated in a place where my queerness is contested on the basis of the homo/hetero divide. Do I need to be attracted to cis men and/or trans men to be gay? Is my queer sexual orientation dependent on my gender identity or is it more about my equipment matching my partner's genitals? There is something spectacular, something monstrous about my transformation especially in the ways my race, gender, sex, and sexuality is (mis)recognized by other beings.

I now have access to male spaces and social expectations due to the economic and pharmacological resources enabled by my educational status as a Harvard and later UCLA graduate student. The nature of my transition from female to male operated within the double bind of being bound to a surgical and hormonal means of recognized embodiment; what was "mutilation" is also enablement, what was read as safety is also dangerous to my historical past. It undoes me even as I am continuously made. I found myself unable to articulate my story without being negative or positive, to escape the dualistic ways of narrating, relating to cis people who want to understand what phenomenology is for a mixed trans man.

It is this gap between negation and positivity, the rupturing "wrinkles" in straight cis time that I find the connection between Ahmed's mixed orientation, Carson's definition of decreation and my own understanding of falling into a queer

time and hidden space. What is behind me can come forward in a queer politics of hope, not by reaching a utopic future in which I will be fully recognized and understood, but one rooted in the present as a threshold which understands:

> [T]he lines that accumulate through the repetition of gestures, the lines that gather on skin, already take surprising forms. We have hope because what is behind us is also what allows other ways of gathering in time and space, of making lines that do not reproduce what we follow but instead create wrinkles in the earth. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 178–9)

My definition of self, created through my acquired habits, turnings within the environment must continuously be moved through, decreated piece-by-piece for a new transfeminist slantwise view opening up new queer genealogies. In doing so I do not give up the material conditions of my racialized, sexualized, and gendered history, it is always behind and before me as the sides gifted by various relationships to my parents, lovers, friends, passersby, and a certain cocker spaniel. In the spectacle of my queer/trans mixedness, I create wrinkles on the earth making a space for others to do likewise, even as I follow those before me.

Endnotes

1 I think it is misleading to call transition linear in any fashion, and so while I use the term female-to-male here in alignment with accepted transgender terminology I hope my narrative will demonstrate a queer disruption of straight narrated temporality. I certainly have felt/still feel out of time and place within any community organized around an identity category, especially white transmasculine ones. To speak of transition is always also to speak of the sociality of haunting in the terms of what Avery Gordon describes in Ghostly Matters; what is placed in the material background continuously comes forward as a structure of feeling, often in disruptive and surprising ways. (See Gordon, 1997, p. 201)

2 Which of course was only highlighted in my later interaction with the black man at the bus stop. A people of color brotherhood in which I was being situated as Latino/Chinese without my understanding was taking place through my lack of knowledge of Spanish. Of course my interlocutor could have been mixed himself, which is what I find particularly interesting about the conversation.

[3] Haole means foreigner in Hawaiian, but was originally used to designate white non-natives.

[4] For the argument of transsexuality as postmodern embodiment heralding of the end of modernist interpretations of the body, see Stryker (1999). See Spade (2011) for the ways neoliberalism as political and economic system has shaped current definitions of trans.

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A received notion of masculinity/Ivory Tower

Julius Thissen

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ABOUT THE ARTIST: Julius Thissen is a visual artist, curator and gender activist. Julius's main themes are the questioning of (gender)identity and diversity in Western society. By the use of masculine stereotypes he explores gender roles in modern day performance culture and the influence of social expectations on our behavior. With his work he aims to create narratives that investigate performing, representation and failure. His work has been nominated for the Hendrik Valk Price, Arnhemse Nieuwe and the Warsteiner Blooom Awards.

In 2016 I shot the first picture that is part of a bigger series called Ivory Tower. This is an ongoing documentation/photography project that is rooted in the speculations that my environment has about my transition. When I started identifying as a transgender man, some people I talked to had the tendency to fantasize about the changes that might occur and how my behavior/interests would (have to) change. While this "enthusiasm" was well-intended, it made me feel pressured and dysphoric, a feeling that remains difficult to describe. Two years later, I took a second picture, documenting the exterior changes. Now, I don't know much about living up to the expectations of the other, but I do know I've lived up to my own and I'm not only talking about the bodily changes. These last few years I have had so many wonderful and touching conversations with people from the LGBTQIA+ community (and allies) that taught me important lessons on self-love and self-care. At the end of the day, our own standards are the only ones we should have to live up to.

Past Caring About Passing

Saoirse Caitlin O'Shea

ABSTRACT: This is an essay concerned with sex, or more specifically my recent experiences of sex, sexual attraction and how they seem to help define me. As a story about sex it is (possibly) salacious and will reveal things about me that some may regard as private, better left unsaid and unsuitable in an academic essay. Except that I am not an academic and this is not an academic essay but a story of someone usually identified as a (transsexual) woman. Except I don't identify myself as a binary transsexual woman but as a non-binary assigned male at birth (AMAB) person. In writing about my sex life I want to ask a few questions about (my) gender, sexuality, identity and deception.

Sex, at least for me, can be risky in more ways than one. I'm anally receptive but sexual risk for me is not all about possible exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), it is also whether a sexual encounter might leave me as a victim of "trans panic": will the next person who fucks me perhaps beat me senseless before claiming I deceived them and they didn't know I was AMAB until it was too late? Am I at more risk, and also more deceptive, if a partner thinks I'm a cis-gender woman or a binary transsexual woman? Just where does the line between being "out and proud", passing and deception lie for me as a non-binary AMAB surviving in a largely binary world?

In this essay, I thus wish to explore how issues of sex and deception might interact and raise questions for me as a non-binary, AMAB person. In doing so I will attempt to interweave a critical analysis of some media stories of sexual deception with an autoethnographic account of sex. I am not wise enough to have answers to my questions, however, but instead hope that others may do so.

KEYWORDS: passing, misidentification, sex by deception, transsexual, non-binary.

AUTHOR NOTE: I'm a non-binary trans person physically "transitioning" and living in the North-East of England. I "came out" a number of years ago and subsequent-

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ly lost family and home. Underemployed on a zero hour contract that pays so little, I now live in fuel poverty in subsidised social housing and eat food supplied by a food bank. But I am thankful that I am no longer homeless; aged 52 I spent six months through the Winter and Spring of 2015/16 rough sleeping. What I wake to is fear of eviction if I can't pay my rent – it forecloses my life to the extent that I fantasize about making myself homeless again just to escape that pervasive fear. After paying rent, council tax, electricity, water and outstanding debts I have less than £7 per week to live on. I was once an academic.

Past caring about passing

In this essay I wish to consider how the erotic sexual practices of some people may seem to braid with a popular trope of "passing" to suggest that transgender people[1] sometimes deceive cisgender people to have "sex by deception". I will focus on the 2015 UK prosecution of Gayle Newland for "sex by deception" and how this and other recent prosecutions may affect transgender people. This is not an abstract issue for me, however, as I identify as non-binary AMAB and am currently in a process of medical transition. As such I will also reflect on autoethnographic examples to consider how "sex by deception" may affect me personally. I want to emphasise that this is very much a personal reflection and do not claim that it is generalizable to others under the transgender umbrella. Nonetheless, I hope my account may add to other voices concerned with how, to paraphrase Nancy Scheman (1997), transgender lives lived may be made liveable.

I'll start with a brief explanation of autoethnography method and its relevance to this essay. I will then consider how passing and deception may condense with erotic sexual life both presumed and actual to form a dangerous amalgam that may leave some transgender people vulnerable to legal prosecutions for "sex by deception". I will consider this particularly in relation to the 2015 criminal conviction of Gayle Newland for just such a crime. I end with a vignette of a recent sexual encounter of mine. This is not a traditional academic ending – I do not summarise and conclude my essay or demonstrate how well I have met my research aims and objectives. Instead, I merely ask some open questions as to what this encounter

may mean to me. I do not have answers to them but instead hope my story may resonate and perhaps provoke those interested in transmaterialities to answer.

Autoethnography and why it is all about me

My twenty-year relationship ended in 2015 due to escalating transphobic abuse that I had experienced since coming out in 2010 became so bad and so frequent that I chose to make myself homeless. Aged 52, homeless, friendless, unemployed and penny-less in a city I did not know, I spent a cold Winter rough sleeping before I was finally identified as vulnerable enough to be offered social housing.

In mid-2016 with a roof over my head but struggling with poverty I was, and remain, both jobless and desperately lonely. I desired a new relationship and in all honesty, I also wanted to have sex again. In 2016 I also stumbled across the case of Gayle Newland and sex by deception in a Facebook discussion. It scared me – it still does – here I am looking for love and sex and there she was, criminalised for sex by deception. Will a sexual partner still love me tomorrow or will I be prosecuted in a court of law or be beaten shitless because of trans panic?

The essay is peppered with autoethnographic examples to illustrate, expand upon and at times question and contest issues raised in the text. Autoethnography, despite being an established research method, remains controversial and is often described by detractors as overly emotive, lacking in objectivity and little more than narcissistic writing (see for instance Wacquant, 2005). Following Contreras (2014) I however believe autoethnography offers the potential to provide a saturated, flesh and blood account of my "lived life". Positioning myself as the subject of my own research "privileges the self-revelatory subject" (Coffey, 1999, p. 118) and allows me to draw on experiences and understandings that may not always be accessible to other forms of observational ethnographic research. Moreover, the form of autoethnography that I use here attempts to evoke both concrete experience and intimate detail (Ellis, 1999) in an emotive account that attempts to achieve emotional resonance (Anderson, 2006) with readers. I do not attempt to convince through rational argument supported by a weight of empirical evidence but rather hope my account is both believable and one readers may find some empathy with. I hope this offers empirical depth whilst also remaining mindful of the concerns of trans folk that some academics in the past used us as the object of

research without sufficient consideration of how those lives were affected: in writing of myself I expose only myself to a risk of moral opprobrium.

Passing, deception and sex

It often seems that the trope of "passing"[2] is both gold standard and *bête noire* for trans-folk. Anecdotally passing often seems to serve as enquiry, comment, evaluation and judgemental gossip – "Do I pass?", "She passes", "Honey, you'll never pass looking like that". The presumption that trans folk need to pass has however been heavily criticised by and since Sandy Stone's 1991 *Manifesto.* I am non-binary and part of my gender identity is based on my visible gender difference; I am neither, nor desire to be, male or female and do not wish to pass as either. But my gender and passing are not all about me, what I do and what I want, they are also about how other people might gender me and where Stone's refusal of passing is perhaps complicated further because I have not and may yet refuse to "fully" transition to the specificity of a post-operative transsexual body (Halberstam, 1998; Snorton, 2009).

In my daily life most strangers assume I am a woman or a binary transwoman crossing from male to female. All of this despite what I say and how I present – T-shirt, skinny jeans, knee high Doc Martins, long hair, no make-up, breast curtesy of HRT and never tucked. Despite visible male and female cues contradicting each other – screaming, "I am not male and I am not female!" – and despite that passing is irrelevant to me, and, refusing to pass, I am still generally viewed either as a woman or as a transwoman who passes. I seem to fail Stone's demand for a transgender visibility not built on lies perhaps because others do not always hear or understand what I am trying to say.

I neither lie about my gender nor attempt to deceive others yet I seem to still be caught in a web of misidentification (Snorton, 2009) when others refuse the evidentness (Goffman, 1963) of my non-binary presentation. Bettcher (2007, p. 47) argues the deployments of the gender binary other people attribute to me despite my self-identification seek to implicate me in a rhetoric of deception in such a way as to impeach my moral integrity and deny my authenticity. I am held to account not for the lies I actually tell but because my misidentification by others is attributed to me as a deliberate deception of mine. This double bind becomes particu-

larly forceful in erotic sexual encounters when a misalignment between gender presentation, sexed body and attribution meet (Bettcher, 2007) in cases of "sex by deception".

Sex by deception

The Gayle Newland court case was the first time I had heard of "sex by deception", despite several other prosecutions for the same offense in the UK in recent years[3]. Newland's story thus has a particular hold on me both for its novelty to me and also because I had only recently decided to be sexually active after the end of a long and generally sexless relationship. I will now briefly recap this case before continuing to consider it in relation to passing, deception and my erotic sex life[4].

On 12th November, 2015 Gayle Newland, found guilty of sexual assault, was sentenced to eight years imprisonment. She won an appeal against her conviction and was released on 12th October, 2016 pending a retrial but was subsequently found guilty and sentenced to six years imprisonment on 20th July 2017. Her prosecution for sexual assault and the harsh sentence resonated through some transgender social media communities in the UK for reasons beyond mere gossip and moral approbation since her crime of "sexual assault by deception" may speak volumes about issues of passing, the lived realities of some trans and non-binary people and sex.

To be clear, Gayle did not identify as a trans-person during her trial – something that led some to state the trial was only about lesbian sexuality and had nothing to do with trans communities. I disagree as the case is about "gender deception" rather than a rather reductive understanding of lesbian and trans identities (Halberstam, 1998). Importantly for this essay Gayle may have denied being transgender in an attempt to avoid further stigmatisation and social opprobrium in court[5]. Her defence provided medical testimony that spoke of Gayle's "low self-esteem [sic]", "troubling sexuality issues" and "blurred gender lines" all "exacerbated" by other issues including "OCD", "social anxiety disorder", "personality disorder" and "depression" (quoted from the judge's sentencing remarks repeated in Stewart, 2015).

In 2013 the plaintiff "X" met Kye Fortune on Facebook for the first time. Kye was Gayle's preferred male self since the age of thirteen. X claimed she did not realise

Kye was Gayle until she subsequently "unmasked" Gayle after many months of a physical relationship. X said the use of blindfolds, masks and looking askance hid Kye's appearance even whilst they watched TV, performed mundane things that couples do, drove in the countryside, went from one home to another and had penetrative sex at least ten times. And all of this continued for months until finally X reached up during sex to put her arm around Kye's neck and realised:

"Something just didn't feel right, so I sat up on the bed. Something in my mind said pull it (the blindfold) off, pull it off. I pulled it off and Gayle was standing their [sic] with a strap-on prosthetic penis. I just couldn't believe it." (X's witness statement to police repeated here in Humphreys, 2015)

If the penis had been "real" sex here would have been consensual and there would be no essay: X was happy for Kye as a "real" man to fuck her. Gayle may well have regarded the prosthetic as a real embodied part of Kye (Ward, 2010). It seems that X recoded the prosthetic as a flesh and blood penis (Bettcher, 2014) in order to maintain her sense of a gendered self as a heterosexual female. This recoding literally required X to remain blind (folded) to the somatic reality of Gayle's naked body over the many months of their physical relationship. Nonetheless what mattered was Gayle was judged to have willfully deceived X as to her gender in order to sexually assault X. Gayle was now a sex offender guilty "of three counts of assault by penetration contrary to section 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003" (Judge's remarks repeated in Stewart, 2015) and sentenced to eight years in jail; a sentence described as "shocking" and "draconian" by an LGBT legal specialist (Sharpe quoted in Robson, 2015). This sentence was considerably longer than this particular trial judge had meted out to two cis-male sex offenders previously found guilty of multiple counts of paedophilia against boys and girls aged between eight and thirteen; X is the same age as Gayle and both were of legal age for consensual sex in 2013. Those cases of paedophilia with multiple victims did not however include "gender deception" and so apparently did not warrant the same harsh sentencing.

And here I return to my concerns that underlie this essay about passing and deception. If other people misattribute my gender despite my clear self-identification am I guilty of deception? Just like Gayle how obvious do I need to be? If my word, like Gayle's, is insufficient am I guilty until I prove my innocence because of a stereotypical assumption that transgender people are presumed to be deceptive (Bettcher, 2007)? Just how do I escape a double bind?

Who will still love me in the morning?

If I have to reveal my gender and sexual history to a prospective partner what should I say: that I lost my virginity with a girl and my anal virginity to an older man in my early teens? Would that tarnish me as promiscuous? Should I say that at school and college I told everyone I was hetero but said to boyfriends that I wasn't in denial about my sexuality and anal receptivity? Do I talk about how I tried to be cis-gender and hetero for years and even married but that my marriage broke down when I told my ex I was trans and she became abusive? All of that says I'm a liar but ignores how my deception was rooted in a fear of homophobia and transphobia, years of dysphoria and an inadequate understanding of myself – it is only relatively recently that I could describe myself as "non-binary and pansexual".

Nowadays how many times should I explicitly mention that I am non-binary just in case a partner hasn't realised, doesn't understand or forgets? Should I ask them to sign and date a statement since I may have to prove my innocence later in court? Should I talk about the physical and sexual assaults and verbal abuse I've suffered when someone notices I'm not cis? Or mention those who think it's ok to grab at my crotch and say, "Just checking"? What of the assault where someone who knew all along that I have a penis, fucked me first and then "panicked" to leave me hospitalised? Or the cis-gender men and women, many of whom are married but proposition me because they want to "experiment": men on the down low and women who see me as a half-way to a lesbian fantasy or perhaps as an effeminate male to be dominated? Or the tranny-chasers who sometimes claim to be trans-amorous, happy only to fuck me in private but not to hold my hand in public (Tompkins, 2011)? Just where in all of this does truth end and the lies begin? Am I the (only) one lying?

An early Saturday evening in the Spring of 2017 and I'm in a bar in town. Everyone seems to be dressed in their best, many women are in dresses, heels and makeup and men are smart casual. And there I sit in jeans, t-shirt and DMs.

"You're fascinating." A bloke sits down opposite me. "What are you?" I stare at him, through him but don't reply. "I'm curious, you're different, fascinating. What are you? Can I buy you a drink?"

"I already have one."

"You fascinate me. You have a dick? Yes? Are you a top?" My drink untouched I get up and leave that bar and go to another.

Later in a different bar and a different bloke: "Do you like the band? Isn't it great to see some live music in town!" And we get to talking about music, the bands we like, the gigs we've been to. And I pointedly tell him I'm non-binary. He gives me a curious look and I explain what I mean. I want him to know before things go any further. I don't want to deceive him but now I worry I've come on to him.

But we talk more. We've quite a lot in common, well at least when it comes to musical taste. We eventually leave and go back to his to talk more. And before talk turns to intimacy and sex I remind him again that I'm non-binary. He looks a little surprised but says it doesn't matter because, "I can really go for you". So I remind him again and he kisses and strokes me to hush me.

We go into his bedroom and I undress in front of him, watching carefully to see how he reacts when I explicitly reveal both breasts and penis to demonstrate how my self-identification aligns with the reality of my body (Bettcher, 2012) and ready to leave if he's not cool with it or not sexually attracted to me (Bettcher, 2014). But he seems ok and we end up in bed and for the first time in many years I have sex with someone. He tries to first wank and then fellate me but I gently stop him as I'd rather he left my penis alone. He fucks me in my ass a couple of times, each time coming too quickly rather like an over eager puppy. Then whilst he cradles me in his arms I fall asleep.

Only to wake in the early dawn. As I get up he stirs, sits up, and watches me from the bed as I wander about naked with everything on display – breasts, penis, warts and all. He looks a little embarrassed, "Well, that was a first for me. I'm not gay, you know; I'm not in to blokes; I'm only interested in women. I only have sex with women. You are very female, you know, just like a woman. Prettier than some". I sigh and repeat that I'm non-binary. He seems to have forgotten his interest last night in my penis and his fumbling attempts to touch and fellate it, me.

He tells me he wants to see me again and gives me his number. I repeat I'm non-binary. "Well yes but you pass". A pause – rather a long pause in fact. Then, "Do you wear dresses and heels? We could go out as a couple and no-one would guess". Is he interested in me now only because he can recode me as a woman (Bettcher, 2014) and so convince himself and his friends he's not on the down low? Would he be interested if I didn't "pass"? Is he interested in me as a person at all? And just

what did I want last night, a shag or the possibility of a relationship? Was I interested in him as a person or only as a cute bloke to fuck me? Why do I now feel hurt, lonely and just a little bit betrayed? In the cold morning light just why do I care? Are we lying to each other, to ourselves or perhaps both? Who is deceiving whom?

I sigh inwardly, get dressed, leaving the slip of paper on the bed to exit and walk the three miles home as yet another new dawn fades to grey.

Just what should I have done and said to him to make clear that I'm non-binary and that I do not try to pass as a woman? Is it my fault that he didn't listen, seemingly didn't understand and apparently didn't want to? Was this about lies and deception or was it more about a double bind (Bettcher, 2007) and denial? Would this relationship ever have worked or would it have quickly turned to tears if (when) he decided I led him on and "turned" him? Would he "panic" and beat seven kinds of shit out of me whilst repeating, "I'm not gay, you know", to reaffirm his heterosexuality to him and his friends; that I was a one-off; a mistake never to be repeated; just a drunken moment to deny and forget? Was this sex by deception? Could I ever prove it was not?

Who will still love me in the morning?

Endnotes

1 In this essay I use both transgender and non-binary as umbrella terms. As Vincent (2016) makes clear the label non-binary may be considered as an umbrella term since it includes several gender identities. I remain aware of the complicated politics of inclusion and exclusion connected to such terms and in using them do not intend to occlude or deny important differences under an umbrella of inclusion and sameness.

2 I will try not to place passing, etc. in scare quotes since to do so would result in an essay positively thicketed with them. I remain very aware however of the politics that surround certain terms.

3 Sharpe, 2014 discusses two different 2013 UK prosecutions of Justine McNally and Christopher Wilson. Sharpe, 2016 discusses UK, US and Israeli prosecutions of sex by deception cases from the 1990s to 2015, including Newland and culminating with Lee in 2015.

4 My description is a confection of local, regional and national English newspaper reports of the trial and subsequent appeal. The newspaper reports referenced here were published as the trial progressed. I cite the online versions rather than the traditional print ones as the former are considerably easier to access regardless of geographical location or time.

5 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

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Cybercocks and Holodicks: Renegotiating the Boundaries of Material Embodiment in Les-bi-trans-queer BDSM Practices

Robin Bauer

ABSTRACT: In this article, the author considers how les-bi-trans-queer BDSM encounters may facilitate the redrawing and questioning of the boundaries of material bodies, employing the theoretical frameworks of Karen Barad and Donna Haraway. Based on the analysis of forty-nine in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with les-bi-trans-queer BDSM practitioners in the US and Western Europe, conducted and analyzed within an adapted version of the grounded theory framework, bodies emerged as boundary projects in les-bi-trans-queer BDSM practices. Drawing on Barad's re-conceptualization of performativity as material, BDSM encounters are understood as apparatuses of phenomena that produce situationally determinate boundaries in intimate performative intra-actions of bodies. The meanings, properties and boundaries of the bodies, which enter the BDSM encounter, have not been settled yet, but they are re-drawn and renegotiated in the intra-action. In reference to Haraway's concept of cyborg embodiment, the "cybercock" is introduced to discuss how strap-on dildos extend the surface of the body and renegotiate its boundaries. The term "holodick" is used for entities that are experienced as part of the body without being material in the usual sense. Both concepts question the boundaries between what is considered animate/inanimate and material/immaterial matter. The sexual and BDSM practices of interview partners therefore make an empirical contribution to the theoretical debate on transgender studies and new materialism.

KEYWORDS: transgender, embodiment, BDSM, sexuality, new materialism.

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Due to his background in both the natural and social sciences he has worked with a transdisciplinary perspective on questions of materiality for almost 20 years. He discovered the writings of Haraway and Barad in the late 1990s while he was studying feminist science studies and epistemology. All of his academic work has been influenced by their epistemological approaches.
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In this article, I will explore potential interfaces between the phenomena "new materialism" and "transgender studies" by producing resonances between trans/queer BDSM practices and the important theoretical interventions of Donna Haraway[1] and Karen Barad by discussing how les-bi-trans-queer BDSM encounters may facilitate the redrawing and questioning of the boundaries of material bodies.

This experiment will be based on stuttering translations (Haraway, 1991, p. 195) of theories concerning themselves with the queerness of particles and critters to trans/queer sexual practices of human animals. The translations are stuttering in the methodological sense that applying theories to embodied situational practices and across disciplinary boundaries will always remain messy, partial and interrupted rather than a perfect fit. The field of study, the material at hand, is resistant to neat and universally valid knowledge claims. Rather than considering this a disadvantage or obstacle in the generation of valid knowlegdes, I agree with Hara-

way that stuttering translations and partial knowledges are desirable and actually preferable over the master-epistemology of the god-trick (Haraway, 1991). This article presents an attempt to engage playfully with boundaries in order to make a contribution to an emerging field of "trans new materialism studies", based on empirical research regarding intimate, sexual practices and trans/queer desires. While this may be a risky methodological move, I am inspired by Barad (2012) in her creative translations from quantum field theory to human trans*matters. As risky practices of playing with boundaries are a crucial ingredient of many BDSM encounters, this approach seems especially suiting given my field of study.

A Grounding Theory Study on Trans/Queer BDSM

Between 2003 and 2008 I conducted forty-nine qualitative semi-structured interviews in person with les-bi-trans-queer BDSM practitioners. The interviews were not focused on the biography of the subjects, but addressed the participants as experts on their own practices, identities, relationships and communities, inquiring issues such as power, consent and boundaries. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, slightly edited for grammar and flow and anonymized. Interview partners were given the option to authorize the transcripts. The interviews were analyzed within an adapted framework of the open coding paradigm from grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory seeks to generate theory from the empirical data, *grounding* theory in it. It operates with coding procedures that are aimed at breaking the data open and to reassemble it according to more abstract, but still concrete codes and categories. These serve as the basis for developing new theories and engaging with and potentially modifying existing theories. I work with a notion of *grounding* rather than grounded theory to emphasize that the codes and categories extracted from the data never sit still, but that they continuously evolve, due to the queerness and fluidity of the data itself, as well as the changing interpretations of data according to context and over time. Due to the nature of this method, all theoretical interventions in this article are based on the results of the analysis of all of the interviews (not just the ones quoted), and statements of the individual interview partners usually re-appear in the form of codes supra-individually and on a more abstract level than for instance in narrative interviews.

The sample was comprised of self-identified dyke/lesbian, bi/pansexual and queer cis- and transwomen, femmes, butches, transgender butches, transmen, genderqueers and individuals which refused the category of gender altogether between the ages of 20 and 60 from the United States and Western Europe who practiced BDSM. The intersex people in my sample were categorized as women by medical authorities and lived as transgender butches and transmen at the time of the interview. All were part of or at the fringes of a BDSM community that had started out as a women's community in the 1970s but had become increasingly trans inclusive and had fuzzy boundaries toward an evolving queer BDSM community.

While this community is highly diverse when it comes to gender, body types, age, sexuality and (non-monogamous) relationship practices, it is mostly populated by white and often highly educated les-bi-trans-queers, although this does not necessarily translate into socio-economic privileges. This is reflected in my sample as well (see Bauer, 2013, pp. 46–53). Therefore, one has to bear in mind that the potentials of the space for experimenting that les-bi-trans-queer BDSM opens up, are not equally accessible to all. For instance, gender and age are renegotiated within a framework of whiteness as a mostly unacknowledged norm (Bauer, 2008; 2014; see also Weiss, 2011).

When referring to the interviews, interview partners[2] are positioned in terms of gender and sexuality according to their self-definitions at the time of the interview and their pronouns of choice are respected. I use past tense to emphasize that these are snapshots of a particular moment in time and that identities and embodiments may have undergone changes since, which seems especially relevant given that many interview partners emphasized their experiences of gendered embodiment as works in progress, processes of becoming or generally fluid. I consider both the knowledges produced in the interview situation and my analytical re-construction of these knowledges as embodied, situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991). On all levels, my research is influenced by my own positioning as a white gay/queer transman with a working class and activist background, which is not stable but has been shifting during my research. For instance, I have been in and out of work, on social welfare, transitioned, changed my main BDSM affiliation from the dyke to the queer and gay male communities and moved from Germany to Belgium during the period my research took place. My own fluctuating positioning and the way I approached my research might for example be one of

the reasons why my sample is very diverse in terms of gender but much less so in terms of race.

Situating this Research

My study is part of a burgeoning field of research on BDSM from a non-pathologizing perspective (see Langdridge and Barker, 2007, for an overview). The acronym BDSM stands for bondage, dominance/submission and sado/masochism and originated in the community to replace pathologizing and inaccurate terms like sadomasochism. It stresses the diversity of practices common in the community, which tend to involve the themes of playing with power, immobilization and intense sensations such as painful stimulations. Research on BDSM has privileged the element of power-based role-playing over the element of sensation play since the publication of the influential studies of Weinberg and his co-researchers (1984).[3] Theoretical frameworks tend to conceive of BDSM as theatre (McClintock, 2004) or performance in reference to Erving Goffman (Lee, 1979; Weinberg, 1995), as well as reiteration (Hopkins, 1994) or performativity in reference to Judith Butler (Hart, 1998). Some authors like Weiss (2011) also discuss the material effects these cultural performances can produce and Hoople acknowledges the limits of the theatre metaphor in pointing out that BDSM does not simply simulate pain, as in theatre, but actually inflicts it on bodies (1996, p. 205). But mostly, the role material embodiment plays has been neglected or understated in attempts to theorize BDSM. The approaches that work with a semiotic-performative framework also tend to stress the denaturalization of power relations in BDSM role-playing because the roles are not prescribed but can be chosen and have to be negotiated by participants. They fail to acknowledge that while this is a theoretical potential of BDSM practices, there are actual limits to this. If a certain role is not erotically charged for someone or they cannot embody or perform it comfortably or convincingly, then the notion of free choice for the top or bottom role is questionable. Finally, the transformative aspects of BDSM have mostly been discussed in relation to identity (e.g. Duncan, 1996) or therapeutic effects (e.g. Weille, 2002), but not in regard to the materiality of the body. New materialism could therefore offer significant new insights into what happens to the material body in BDSM, a point I will address below when using Barad to come up with an understanding of a BDSM encounter.

This study also contributes to the nascent field of research on the sexuality of trans people. It resonates with other empirical studies that have shown how the use of language can function to resignify body parts (Edelman and Zimman, 2014). Yet, according to Pfeffer (2016), there is a dearth of explicit discussion of sexual embodied practices themselves in this field of study; Davidmann even speaks of disembodiment in academic accounts of trans sexuality (2014, p. 638). Yet sexual practices in particular provide a promising starting point for theorizing the materiality of trans bodies, as sexuality is heavily embedded in a presumed gender/sex binary and therefore sexual interactions are one of the most strongly gendered type of social interaction. Sexuality and sex/gender are highly co-constitutive of each other: gender is reinforced or questioned in sexual encounters and sexuality is organized through the concept that bodies have a certain sex, which desire is based on and categorized into same-sex and opposite-sex. Trans interview partners and their play partners for instance emphasized the important role sexuality played in co-constructing the trans individuals' bodies in a way that suits and validates their gendered sense of self (see also Pfeffer, 2008; Davidman, 2014; Edelman and Zimman, 2014). Existing research on BDSM from a trans perspective, including my own, describes BDSM as a space that is used to play and experiment with gender and embodiment (Hale, 2003; Kaldera, 2009; Stryker, 2008). It therefore represents an analysis of trans/queer sexual practices that can provide an interesting contribution to the emerging field of trans materialities studies and research on trans sexualities that goes beyond the discussion of issues of sexual identity, partnerships and linguistic perspectives to how sexual interactions actually transform material embodiments, rather than vice versa how changes in embodiment through hormones and surgery affect the sexual practices of trans individuals and their partners (see Schilt and Windsor, 2014).

The encounter of new materialism and transgender studies to form its queer offspring trans materialism studies unites two theoretical perspectives that are in themselves heterogeneous, but share a certain commitment to highlighting that matter matters, even though at first they do seem to come from very different directions.

Transgender studies have critically engaged with queer theory, especially with Judith Butler's theory of performativity (1990), since its emergence, from the perspective of trans experiences and narratives that insist on the more material as-

pects of gendered embodiment (see for instance Prosser, 1998; Namaste, 2000). Two of the most prominent agents in new materialism, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, whose work will serve as the main reference point in this article, have also highlighted the significance of material matters from a feminist sciences studies perspective (Haraway, 1991; Barad, 1996). Both, transgender studies and feminist science studies therefore share an interest in developing theoretical frameworks that do not treat the material body as a blank slate for cultural inscriptions.

Both, Haraway and Barad, re-imagine matter and bodies as active participants in the production of knowledge (epistemologically) as well as in the world's becoming (ontologically) (Barad, 2002, p. 803). Haraway characterizes bodies as material-semiotic generative nodes (1991, p. 200). The boundaries and therefore the shapes of bodies materialize in social interactions; they are boundary projects. Haraway utilizes the figure of the Native American trickster Coyote to stress the witty agency of matter in this context (p. 199). The trickster is also embodied by other animals, like Raven or Hare, and in other cultural contexts, such as Fox in German folklore.[4] So in various regional mythologies, trickster figures play a significant role, for instance as the world's creator. Trickster possesses (magic) powers, which s/he ab/uses to hir own advantage, trying to manipulate others to attain food or sexual favors. Yet through hir own stupidity or circumstance, s/he often ends up hood-winked hirself (see Swann, 1996). So when Haraway suggests the trickster as a metaphor for matter, it highlights what she calls "the world's independent sense of humor" (1991, p. 199). Matter is not passive, it functions as an agent, and moreover it tricks us, those seeking to capture it, for instance when producing knowledge about trans bodies. This is because the boundaries of bodies are not prefixed; they are unsettled and unsettling and sighting them is a risky business (p. 201).

Barad takes this up, but introduces the notion of intra-action to replace the concept of interaction, based on her discussion of quantum physicist Bohr's epistemological positions. Bohr observed that material entities do not possess inherently determinate boundaries or properties (Barad, 2003, p. 813). To him, the primary epistemological units are not independent objects, but phenomena (p. 815). Agencies of observation (such as scientific instruments or human perception) are inseparable from the observed object (Barad, 2003, p. 814; 1996, p. 169) and phenomena are the result of intra-acting components (Barad, 2003, p. 815).

Thus, in Barad's reading, Bohr brought about a profound conceptual shift: rather than speaking of interaction, which presumes the prior existence of independent entities with clear boundaries, he reconceptualized relationality in terms of intra-action of phenomena (Barad, 2003, p. 815; 2012, p. 32). Through specific agential intra-actions the boundaries and properties of the components of phenomena become temporarily determinate; intra-acting matter is constraining and therefore shaping. But the outside boundary remains indeterminate and prevents any permanent closure, as apparatuses of production are themselves open-ended practices and phenomena. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity (Barad, 2003, p. 822) and boundaries therefore do not sit still (p. 817), a point that Haraway also stresses. Boundaries of bodies materialize in material-social intra-actions. But boundaries shift from within, they are tricky (the trickster element) and capturing boundaries remains a risky practice (Haraway, 1991, p. 201). Barad concludes that performativity should not be understood as iterative citationality (as by Butler), but as iterative intra-activity (2003, p. 828), stressing its material-semiotic quality (in Haraway's words). Both Barad and Haraway therefore suggest an understanding of material bodies as *boundary projects*.

Bodies as Boundary Projects in Queer BDSM Practices

BDSM emerged as a risk-taking activity in the interviews (see Lee, 1979), in regard to physical dangers as well as emotional edges.[5] The combination of and tension between pleasure and danger in BDSM created intense experiences for interview partners. Encountering and learning about boundaries played a crucial role in their les-bi-trans-queer BDSM practices, as butch lesbian Luise put it: "I think that SM serves to encounter one's limits. I think that is exactly that what makes it appealing. And I enjoy playing with that very much".[6] The space of les-bi-trans-queer BDSM provided interview partners with the opportunity to explore all kinds of boundaries, individual as well as cultural ones, psychological as well as the edges of material embodiment. Exploring and pushing boundaries was a crucial element of the BDSM practices of interview partners and BDSM can therefore usefully be understood as intimate edgework, as Newmahr's study on a different, pansexual subset of the BDSM community also suggests (2011, pp. 144–186). Lyng defines

edgework as voluntary high-risk behavior involving negotiating the boundary between chaos and order, life and death, consciousness and unconsciousness and sanity and insanity (1990, pp. 855–6). Edgework activities involve a threat to one's physical or mental wellbeing or one's sense of an ordered existence (p. 857), testing limits of body and mind (p. 858). These kinds of limit experiences take a subject to the edge of existence itself, and are therefore characterized by intensity. My interviews suggest that les-bi-trans-queer BDSM is not simply about playing the edge as a serious leisure activity (which is the framework Newmahr suggests), but about pushing one's limits and changing one's relationship to the boundaries one engages with, ultimately leading to a transformation of the self, including processes of re-bodying. I therefore understand les-bi-trans-queer BDSM not simply as playing the edge, but as renegotiating bodies as boundary projects through exploring and pushing limits.

Part of pushing bodily limits is what is referred to as sensation play within the BDSM community, the intense stimulation of the body. Contrary to common misconceptions, it is not pain (or violence) in the usual sense BDSM practitioners seek out. Rather it is carefully selected sensations in a specific consensual context that prepares the receiving end for the stimulation and gives the sensations a different meaning than pain. This may lead to orientating and opening the body towards the person inflicting the pain, welcoming the pain as well as the liminal, boundary-shifting state that is produced in this situation and transforming it into something pleasurable or experiencing simultaneities of pleasure and pain/discomfort. There are various techniques to manage intense and painful stimulation, such as visualization, breathing and welcoming the impact on the material body. All these have the potential to open up the body and shift or stress its boundaries.

Interview partners therefore experienced bodies as boundary projects in their les-bi-trans-queer BDSM practices. As an intimate embodied limit-experience, les-bi-trans-queer BDSM opens up a space to renegotiate and shift bodily boundaries in intimate intra-actions. Therefore I understand les-bi-trans-queer BDSM encounters as *apparatuses of phenomena that produce situationally determinate boundaries in intimate performative intra-actions of bodies*. The meanings, properties and boundaries of the bodies, which enter the BDSM encounter, have not been settled yet, but they are re-drawn and renegotiated in the intra-action. And les-bi-

trans-queer BDSM seems to be a social phenomenon that increases the likelihood of transformation in such intra-actions through opening up the bodies because of its intimate intensity and material-performative character. Les-bi-trans-queer BDSM is about those boundary-crossing, boundary-shifting moments, moments of resisting the closure of form, moments of reopening the body to re-workings, re-materializings. The liminal space of BDSM thus provides individuals with the experience of bodies as boundary projects and with limited, but real agency to actively re-construct and co-construct bodies in intimate and intense intra-actions. The agency of the individual remains limited due to the trickster quality of matter that Haraway emphasizes. The queerness of matter itself presents an incalculable limit to the re-making of embodied subjectivities. As Barad also stresses, "the world kicks back" (1996, p. 188). That matter can be rather stubborn may be demonstrated by Luise's story of "involuntary butchness":

> That is something I was forced to engage with lately, because I was called a butch and at first I was very indignant, because I actually never wanted any of these definitions for myself ever. But when I take a look at myself, over the years, then I have turned from a baby butch into a big fat butch, that is totally obvious. But not because of any role models, but simply because I am that way. […] But I will never pass as a femme. Then I look like a queen.

Luise experienced butch masculinity as something that happened to her, that she embodied (against her will). Her case points to the limits of a theoretical understanding of performativity as iterative citationality and stresses the materiality of performativity. Luise's attempt to present feminine, according to society's expectations, would result in a failed performance, as she states "then I would look like a queen"[7]. So Luise's embodiment has neither developed as a positive answer to the interpellation to become a feminine woman, neither to the interpellation to become a masculine man (she embodied butchness but did not define as a trans-man), neither to subcultural gender roles such as butch, with which she only got in touch with later in life. Rather, a resistant, excessive or exuberant element in the materiality of the body may be postulated to explain her butchness, a trickster element that not only eludes the control of the individual, but also social normalization and that stresses the agency of matter.

Les-bi-trans-queer BDSM as Space for Exploring Embodied Difference

In the les-bi-trans-queer BDSM communities, the explicit negotiating of consent is a common standard (and a potential technology to assume responsibility for the co-construction of boundaries, see Bauer, 2014). This regularly includes the negotiation of the gender assumed for the BDSM interaction. The possibility of choosing a gender for the duration of the BDSM encounter (or in community space) opens up a space to explore one's own gender and to experiment with alternative sketches of gender and age. This playful element becomes apparent in the popularity of dominant-submissive role-playing, as femme cisdyke Mistress Mean Mommy explained:

> We get to explore. For me it's no different than reading a book. I always use as an example James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* I can't understand what it's like to be a 15-year-old Irish boy in an all boys' boarding school. But I can read the book and have a sense of what it's like. So if you wanna go out and buy a school-boy's uniform and wear it and have somebody be the schoolmaster and I get to play it, now I have a sense of what it's like, even as me in my body as a woman. I'll never be a 15-year-old boy. I get to experience what I think a 15-year-old boy would be like. And that might be freeing in some way. Maybe it will give me a different perspective. Maybe I'll suddenly understand something I never understood about young boys.

Even though Mistress Mean Mommy starts her explanation of what happens during BDSM role-playing by comparing it with entering different worlds through reading, it becomes clear in this quote that BDSM role-playing is taking this experience a step further as it involves an embodied experience. Through assuming a different gender, age, and class position, the player is trying to experience difference through an affective, sensual, embodied performance. BDSM is portrayed as a space that holds the potential to open up bodies as boundary projects to playfully cross and resettle boundaries. Mistress Mean Mommy also highlights the simultaneity of differing material realities: She experiences being a 15-year-old boy in a grown ciswoman's body. So while she is becoming something else during the

BDSM interaction and experiencing that in her body, the body also seems to present limits to her transformation. This results in embodying both, a grown woman and a young boy, at the same time, so there is no definite resettling of the boundaries of the body, rather an opening toward a state of indeterminacy, an indeterminacy that hints at the queerness of matter itself. And that enables participants to encounter a difference within. While in Mistress Mean Mommy's example, being a boy is a temporary state that is left behind at the end of the role play, we will see below that for other interview partners, embodiment is actually transformed in the process.

In her more recent writings on quantum field theory, Barad has described the void as a space that enables the exploration of all possible couplings of virtual particles, of wild activities and queer transformations (2015, pp. 394–399), expressions that could be used to characterize les-bi-trans-queer BDSM space based on my empirical research. Virtual possibilities, like that of Mistress Mean Mommy becoming a young boy, abound and are explored. Moreover, in her discussion of particles like the electron, Barad points out how matter can be understood as an involution, which gets in contact with an "infinite alterity" at the core of its existence through self-touching (2015, p. 399). She concludes: "All touching entails an infinite alterity, so that touching the other is touching all others, including the 'self,' and touching the 'self' entails touching the stranger within" (2015, p. 401). This resonates strongly with how my interview partners described playing with gender and age as getting in touch with and experiencing other/difference within themselves. This intimate self-touching enabled them to embody other genders and ages in role-playing, and becoming-trans, whether temporarily or permanently. Barad's insistence on the queerness of matter and nature itself defies the very concept of a homogeneous identity at the core of our being, the particles that we are made of (2015, p. 411). It is possible to read the potential of experience of difference within through embodied BDSM intra-actions as an expression of that queerness of matter itself; just like the electron, les-bi-trans-queer BDSM encounters are "experiments in intra-active trans*material performativity" (2015, p. 401).

In the following, I will give examples of how the les-bi-trans-queer BDSM space enabled interview partners to engage in becoming trans and in re-constructing not only their own gendered embodiments, but in questioning cisgenderist concepts of the material body and reality. Cisgenderism can be understood as an ide-

ology that makes the cultural assumption that there are only two sexes (male/female), two respective genders (man/woman), that these are clearly distinguishable, constant throughout a lifetime, that the gender of an individual can be attributed from the outside via sex characteristics etc. (see Garfinkel, 2006). Ansara and Berger (2016) include a critique not only of the man/women gender binary, but also the binary distinction between cis and trans in their definition of cisgenderism. This resonates with my research on les-bi-trans-queer BDSM practices, which has shown that this distinction is not clear-cut and that it is not useful to limit the concept of trans to permanent and whole trans identities and embodiments. Rather, my definition of trans in the context of this research includes temporary transgressions and partial and genderqueer transformations as well, such as in gender playing practices of femmes who play as men or genderqueers who slide in and out of different gender positions (see Bauer, 2016).

Cybercocks and Holodicks

Playing with gender has resulted in processes of re-coding and re-materializing bodies for some interview partners. Their experience of their gendered bodies changed without medical means, but sometimes only to a certain extent and not in the same way for everyone. Some trans people also made use of gender-reassigning medical technologies. Gender-based BDSM play enabled them to explore the ways material embodiment mattered in the context of their own gendered and sexual practices and interactions, more precisely it helped them investigate if they needed to make use of medical body modifications like hormones and surgical cutting to live with a sense of bodily integrity. For some interview partners like transgender butch Tony BDSM interactions led to transformed senses of embodiment:

> And in sex or SM […] it's strongly about embodiment and about those roles that are attached to embodiment. And if the roles are suddenly different *from an embodiment that was previously imagined as stable*, then I think that a sequence of sessions that permanently play with a different kind of embodiment, make quite a big difference, also in the self image. So I think that if I couldn't say with a certain self-confidence about myself: "in this moment I have a male body", then

> the sessions wouldn't work. Then I would feel uncomfortable, and it wouldn't work. And what happened in any case in these role plays was this working out of a boi[8] identity. I didn't have that outside of SM at all. Later this got interwoven. [emphasis Bauer]

A sequence of BDSM games in masculine roles resulted in the emergence of a new identity with another embodiment for Tony, as well as the self-confidence to live it in everyday life eventually. In Tony's words, before ze played with gender in the lesbi-trans-queer BDSM context, hir embodiment was conceptualized as stable and marked according to cisgenderist biological criteria as "female". But embodying a different kind of gender in BDSM role-playing resulted not only in a shifting of hir gender identity and embodiment (now experienced as "male" without any medical interventions by both hir and hir partner), but moreover in an awareness of the malleability of the material body in general, the queerness of matter. The boundaries of the body became unstable and open to transformation through repetitive role-playing in other genders and ages. Thus, one might say, Barad's conception of matter as iterative intra-activity (2003, p. 822) becomes apparent to Tony. This material performativity ultimately led to different kinds of embodiments for various interview partners in this way.

The case of strap-on dildos represents one experiment in intra-active trans*material performativity, which incorporates something that is usually considered a technical or artificial object (a dildo, a sex toy) as a body part (a penis). For interview partners with a transmasculine gender expression, such as transmen, transgender butches and butches, or those who identified as women but played as a man in the BDSM context, as well as their play partners, dildos were not dildos in the usual sense, but real parts of their transmasculine bodies and they called them their dicks (see also Schilt and Windsor, 2014, where some transmen seem to conceive of dildos as dildos and others as penises). Transgender queer butch dyke Scout in the following passage emphasizes the incorporation of the "dildo" as a body part:

> And fucking with a dildo is like when I'm feeling it, I'm connected to it. And playing in bed in the morning when waking up and fucking, we call it a dick when I don't have anything on. It's in my brains and she still comes, it's also really

> intense. So there's this kind of tricky thing, but we call it a dick for a lack of a better word, but it's not like I desire a dick, a flesh penis dick. I don't have a desire for that.

The extension of the material surface of the body to incorporate an artifact is based on the existence of an immaterial penis in Scout's case. Strapping on a dildo provided his immaterial dick with a material form. He could sense it like a consolidated part of his body, an extension of the boundaries of his body, a transformation of the shape. Scout was not seeking out a substitute for a penis made of flesh and blood; his butch trans masculinity did not create a desire for that. There is no intentionality behind this phenomenon; rather matter displays its queer qualities by stretching out to incorporate other material objects to create unexpected forms of embodiment. Other interview partners also emphasized that dildos represented body parts in this way. Therefore I introduce the concept of the *cybercock* to describe this phenomenon. As with cyborgs, these artificial extensions of the body are incorporated for trans and genderqueer interview partners in the literal sense: they are not a foreign substance, but part of the material embodied and sentient self. They extend bodily integrity into a hybrid of flesh and artefact, thus into a cyborg embodiment.

Haraway conceptualizes the subject as cyborg. The cyborg embodies partiality, irony, intimacy, perversity, opposition, utopia and a lack of innocence. Through hir position at the interface between organism and machine the cyborg necessitates a redefinition of "nature"/"culture" and the "animate"/"inanimate". Cyborgs are children of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, but as illegitimate offspring they are not necessarily loyal towards their culture of origin (Haraway, 1991, p. 151). As children of a gender binary and medical expert system, queer/trans cyborgs also betray their origin and become something other than their creators intended. For instance activists who question the system of binary gender itself, rather than adjust to it and pass in it. In a similar fashion, transgender theorist Susan Stryker (2006a) appropriates the figure of the monster in her subversive reading of the Frankenstein's monster as a metaphor for the transsexual as a herald of the unnatural which transgresses the boundaries of gender. Eric appropriated a third posthuman figure when describing himself: "Born female, but I feel more comfortable in alien SM body than woman or male body". The image of the alien strongly points

at the degree of Eric's alienation from the binary gender system and on how others may perceive him, as literally not from this world. But even though he did not seem to be at home on his home planet, he still had a location. Being unrooted is not the same as being nowhere; as Rubin points out, dislocatedness is not the same as absolute absence of location (2003, p. 336). Rather, Eric found a location on another planet. As opposed to dehumanizing anti-trans discursive strategies, such as calling trans and inter people "it", the alien represents an empowering metaphor, enabling a positive identification, especially in the BDSM context, in which science fiction themed role-playing may be erotically charged.

Monster, alien and cyborg are forms of subjectivities that exceed regulation, creating exuberant excesses of signification and potentials to create something beyond the human. The cyborg element in queer/trans BDSM was not necessarily restricted to dildos that were incorporated into the body as dicks, but could also be found in the employment of other implements, such as whips, which extend the body to exert power and generate perverse pleasures. The cyborg emphasizes the fact that all humans are dependent upon some kind of artifacts and technologies for survival, and therefore deconstructs the binary of natural/unnatural, which is too often used to pathologize bodies that are constructed as trans and disabled as well as non-normative sexualities such as queer BDSM or the use of sex toys as "unnatural".

Queer/trans BDSM and cyborg embodiments and subjectivities have a lot in common. Both generate "perverted" and "unnatural" forms of kinship, embodiment and desire, transgress boundaries such as those between human and machine/artifact, nature and culture, man and woman, blood and chosen kinship relations etc. In regard to the cybercock, it is specifically the boundary between animate and inanimate matter that is transgressed, as "lifeless matter" comes to life in this form of trans embodiment, when the dildo turns into a sentient part of the body. This phenomenon proves Barad right in pointing out that distinguishing between such categories as animate and inanimate produces materializing effects and that we need to start our analysis before these boundaries are settled (Barad, 2012, p. 31). In this queer/trans sexual practice, these boundaries are redrawn in iterative intra-actions between play partners' bodies and sex toys, and the cybercock emerges situationally. According to Haraway, cyborgs have more to do with regeneration than rebirth (Haraway, 1991, p. 181). And regeneration as a

trans-queer embodied practice, such as with the production of the cybercock, is a re/iterative enactment of not only growing new boundaries, but also of imperiling static boundaries in general (Hayward, 2008, p. 75).

The cybercock is not the only trans-queer embodiment in the excerpt from Scout's interview. He also talks about the possession of a non-material penis. The fact that his partner is able to orgasm when penetrated with this non-material entity shows that this penis can be perceived and experienced inter-subjectively. Rather than referring to a phenomenological framework to understand this entity as a phantom limb (see for instance Prosser, 1998), I propose a re-reading from a new materialism perspective that questions the boundary between the material/immaterial and stresses the queerness of matter in general. I propose the concept of the *holodick* for the phenomenon of this kind of immaterial penis with material force, in reference to the so-called holodecks in the US science fiction series *Star Trek*. In Star Trek, holodecks are spaces of simulated reality, which blur the boundaries between what is commonly thought of as material reality and the virtual or immaterial fantasy. Humans and aliens enter the holodeck with their material bodies and move through this simulated reality as in a role-play. They experience real embodied affects while certain effects of everyday reality are suspended for security reasons, for instance weapons are not deadly. Holodeck reality therefore bears resemblance to the reality of the partially secured setting of BDSM with its risk-management strategies and ethics of consent. The concept of the holodick may be even more accurate than the phantom dick. For one, the trans experience is usually not about lost body parts (although it might be for intersex individuals). Second, the holodick can be perceived as material by partners in sexual encounters and therefore possesses an intersubjective reality, as in the holodeck. Furthermore, the holodick can also be understood as an experience that is in some cases limited by time and space. Such a virtual body part could appear temporarily in certain alternative realities like a BDSM role-play. Vito for instance, who lives as a bisexual ciswoman in her everyday life and embodies a male vampire in BDSM with her wife, described how she experiences a male orgasm as vampire. But this had no impact on her everyday identity and embodiment as a ciswoman. So as the holodeck can be entered and exited, the body can be reconfigured through incorporating and dis-engaging from a holodick (and cybercock).

So les-bi-trans-queer BDSM is a space in which experiments in intra-active

trans*material performativity are bound to happen. Cybercocks and holodicks are results of boundary work that transgress the limits of bodies temporarily and permanently and expand the material body to incorporate in/re-animated matter as well as virtual/immaterial entities. And they are not necessarily restricted to trans-identified individuals as Vito's example shows. Moreover, sex/gender embodiments are always co-constructed in les-bi-trans-queer BDSM settings, for instance the play partners shared the perception of cybercocks and holodicks as "real", material body parts. This resulted in the questioning of what is real, material and what is fantasy, virtual/immaterial/imagined.

Parallel Worlds: Shape-shifting Bodies

Eric defined himself as unisexual, a term he had invented to describe a body that:

> changed sex from one day to another. So some days you feel like a male and the next day you feel like an alien with a mixed body, like a male breast and woman pussy. [laughs] And the next day you maybe have a male proper body, then you wear a strap-on as well.

What is especially interesting in Eric's description is that he explicitly referred to his *material body* as changing between male and alien/mixed, not simply to his inner sense of self or his outer appearance/performance. With this concept of the shape-shifting body he radically questioned cisgenderist and rationalist perceptions of objective reality and materiality. From his perspective, material reality (his body) and virtual reality respectively "fantasy" (his body as shape-shifter) were inseparable. This is significant, because many trans and genderqueer interview partners questioned the hegemony of cisgenderist objectivity and confronted it with their own realities and materialities. For instance, Tony, who identifies as transgender butch with a medically non-modified, cis"female" body recounted:

> It was a situation in which I played on the bottom as boi, and my partner undressed me and put me in front of a mirror. And for the first time I really consciously saw in my naked body an absolutely boyish or masculine body. And afterwards I had this experience of "what biology tells us is simply complete

> bullshit". [laughs] I see what I want to see and my partners can also see, what they want to see.

In this apparatus of bodily production (Haraway, 1991, pp. 197–201) that includes intra-actions between Tony, hir partner and a mirror among other elements, intelligibility and materiality were re-constituted (Barad, 2003, p. 820). Tony was spontaneously capable to read hir body differently than normatively prescribed, what led hir to the conclusion that the perception of material, even naked, bodies is not determined through "biological facts". Rather, it is an accomplishment of social learning, of specific visual technologies, to assign a particular meaning to bodies, which can be re-learned as well. The phrasing "I see what I want to see" should not be misinterpreted as an expression of the free will of an autonomous subject in this context though. The trickster quality of the world remains virulent, eluding human control in this matter. Rather, Tony's example illustrates that nothing about the supposed unambiguous categorizing of bodies into "male" and "female" is unmediated or evident, but that seeing is a cultural accomplishment that filters and interprets what information our visual organs provide us with, as Haraway points out, there is no "passive vision" (1991, p. 190). The subject therefore is neither transparent to itself nor others, rather even such basic physical activities as seeing are of a cultural and social nature. The seemingly unmediated queer/trans reading of Tony's body is therefore part of a longer critical engagement with visual practices of categorizing bodies. It is not a single act of great will power, but the result of a series of BDSM intra-active sessions that had passed before and had opened up seeing for Tony and hir partner to other reconfigurations than the culturally prescribed ones.

As Tony in regard to his boi identity, many interview partners reported that embodiments and identities emerged specifically in the les-bi-trans-queer BDSM context. These often originated in sexual fantasies, making a case for desire as a queer/trans catalyst, as in the following quote from genderqueer Femmeboy:

> I always had this fantasy of fucking a fag up the ass. This was a little dream desire. And so when I started fucking my trans lover up the ass as fags, we played as fags often. It was an important step from the fantasy to the reality, because then in reality that's what we were doing. I mean some people would say we were not really doing that because "you're not a fag and he's not a bio boy" or whatever, but

I really felt that I was exploring that fag part of myself. So it's not just a fantasy, it's a real part of me. You know, I feel it. So there's a bridge, there's a bridge.

If more stable rather than just temporary trans and genderqueer identities and embodiments developed, they were transferred to everyday life. This often led to conflicts in cisgenderist society. In her quote, Femmeboy for instance described how the sexual interactions between her as a genderqueer person with a cis-female body and her FTM lover would not be acknowledged as gay male outside of the trans/queer subculture. This leads to competing perceptions of what is real as a consequence, as modern discourses on sex/gender are based on the assumption of a universally valid reality in which bodies can be distinguished unambiguously and unproblematically as either male or female (and as intersexual as a pathology). In this belief system, trans becomes a false, even fraudulent performance or misjudgment of the truth of sex (see also Stryker, 2006b, p. 9).

Therefore, parallel worlds evolve, in which the same action (Femmeboy and her partner having anal sex) is assigned with different meanings (to Femmeboy and her partner: gay male sex, to the cisgenderist gaze: two ciswomen having lesbian sex; to a certain transsexual discourse: a ciswoman and a transman having heterosexual sex, etc.). These competing interpretations do not exist alongside evenly though, but are endowed with different authority. Not all interview partners found themselves in the position to express and live their trans and genderqueer identities outside of the les-bi-trans-queer BDSM context. The self-determination of gender and the reconfiguration of (sexed) matter face structural limits that cannot be overcome by the individual or subculture on their own. The burden to bear these contradictions and find a way to deal with them usually lies on the marginalized subject and is individualized.

Conclusion

What do les-bi-trans-queer BDSM encounters that involve gender-based dominance/submission role-playing and intense stimulations of the body have in common with such seemingly remote phenomena as virtual particles and lightening? Following Barad, they may all be considered experiments in intra-active trans*material performativity, showcasing matter's experimental nature, "its propensity to test out every un/imaginable path, every im/possibility" (Barad, 2015,

p. 387). The same trans/queerness and perversion that she detects at the heart of nature, of matter, of materiality, can be found in the BDSM practices described in my interviews, as the examples of cybercock, holodick, alien and changeling illustrate. These phenomena are empirical examples that support an understanding of bodies as boundary projects, that attest to the trickster nature of all matter and that challenge boundaries between man/woman, nature/culture, animate/inanimate, material/immaterial.

These practices are first and foremost an expression of trans/queer desires and quests for perverse pleasures, yet they also produce rebodying effects. These queer/trans BDSM practices are sexual, embodied and messy intra-actions that involve taking pleasure in transgressing boundaries and un/intentionally getting in touch with alterity within. What kinds of connections are made possible depends not only on the trans/queerness of matter, but also on the various power fields they are part of. As Haraway and Barad remind us, there are no innocent ways of knowing or being and BDSM is maybe the area of sexuality where this becomes most evident, given that it eroticizes power in myriad ways. While this is a risky practice, it also holds potentials that I have tried to sketch in this article. Finally, its lack of pretence to be "natural" and "innocent" may yet be trans/queer BDSM's most promising feature.

Endnotes

1 Even though Haraway's (as well the Barad's) early publications predate the emergence of the term "new materialism", I include her work under this umbrella because her theoretical interventions laid the groundwork for the field of new materialism yet to emerge.

2 I refrain from using the term "interviewee" as it its implied passivity does not do justice to the work the interviewed subject performs when reconstructing certain experiences and narratives of their life. The term "interview partner" is able to stress the process of co-producing accounts of social reality during the interview.

3 Newmahr's study (2011) is one of the exceptions, as she explicitly discusses playing with pain.

4 Haraway explicitly refers to the Native American trickster Coyote, which can be interpreted as cultural appropriation. She seems to use it as one example of "useful myths for scientists" (1991, p. 199) and therefore as a means to question the hierarchy between various kinds of knowledges, invested with different kinds of power. Read in this way, her reference to Native American knowledges can also be considered an attempt to decenter the authority of white Western scientific knowledge.

5 The community has therefore developed risk-management strategies over time (Bauer, 2014; Weiss, 2011).

6 All interviews originally conducted in German have been translated by the author as closely to the original sense as possible for the sake of the empirical analysis.

7 The German term "Tunte" that Luise employed is somewhere between "drag queen", and "fag" in the sense of an "effeminate" gay man.

8 Boi as a queer BDSM role and identity was very common in the community. It was used to express a particular kind of bottom role or a role in a different, younger age position. The alternative spelling boi with "I" instead of "Y" is simultaneously used to create a distance from pedophilia and from stereotypical ideas of masculinity. The possibility to explore alternative forms of masculinity is one reason that makes it so popular among interview partners (Bauer, 2018).

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A Generous and Troubled Chthulucene: Contemplating Indigenous and Tranimal Relations in (Un)settled Worldings

Sebastian De Line

ABSTRACT: This article is an analysis of key topics in Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kinship in the Chthulucene*. By following the game rules of the two string figures, cat's cradle (non-Indigenous) and na'atl'o' (Din'eh), the article weighs from Indigenous perspectives the political and ontological implications of such multispecies storytelling. Through its diffractive close reading, this paper puts in conversation Indigenous and non-Indigenous concepts and authors: Deleuzian rhizomatic deterritorialization and Indigenous self-determinacy, paradigmatic All My/Our Relations of Winona LaDuke, Leroy Little Bear, and Gregory Cajete, and the spider *pimoa cthulhu*. The aim is to recognize the multiplicity of forms of kinships or dependencies and to consider what kind of implications they have on marginalized assemblages.

While Haraway suggests to call our contemporary planetary condition the Chthulucene, an epoch that requires from us to rethink relationality and co-existence, this paper looks at how the animacy of the world and the relationality of nonhuman and human animals in it create circumstances for "tranimals to emerge." By giving ethical consideration to our material animacy, tranimacy will serve us as a tool to analyse the entanglement of nonhuman and human animals, trans materiality, and questions relating to agency.

KEYWORDS: Chthulucene, Indigeneity, Trans, tranimality, diffraction, animacy, relationality, assemblage.

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The trouble with critiquing the ones you love is that unless they know your motives, there is a risk that the receivers of critique do not take the gesture as a form of intimacy. Does the critic aim to point out inherent problems in order to bring closer together those she/he/they/it is invested in by improving the quality of relations, or to create distance? A dear friend of mine once told me that intimacy is not how well we relate to one another through harmonious interaction, but how we deal with conflict together. I believe that this is what Donna Haraway is referring to when she urges us to "stay with the trouble." My investment in forming kinships with Donna Haraway and reading her work in relation to Indigenous philosophy began "diffractively[1]," in the metaphoric sense of the word, as Haraway would say. New materialism's turn to animacy left lingering a simple question that while seemingly obvious, ripples out like a processional wave. That is, is animate matter a new materialist concept or is this not the basis of Indigenous philosophy and science? As I dove into this question, I was lead to a lecture given by Leroy Little Bear in 2011 at Arizona State University entitled "Native Science and Western Science: Possibilities for Collaboration." My investment in supporting Little Bear's call for collaboration stems from my own politics as a queer feminist. Who are our potential co-conspirators? The diffractive work of Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, and Anna Tsing come to mind. In this article, I will discuss various topics in Donna Haraway's book, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kinship in the Chthulucene*, the string games of cat's cradle with na'atl'o', kinship, sympoiesis and autopoiesis, animacy and imagining how trans materialities participate in her multispecies string theory.

The section *On Cat's Cradle* discusses one of Donna Haraway's string figuring metaphors (the string game of cat's cradle), breaking down the rules of the game in order to translate it into the philosophical traditions that the game implies. *On Na'atl'o'* traces the implications of another string figuring game, the Din'eh game

of na'atl'o' and how this relates to the Deleuzian flow, the rhizome, deterritorialization and Indigenous self-determination. *On Indigenous Relationality* covers the basics of the three tenets of Indigenous science by Leroy Little Bear, while *On Philosophical Kinship* addresses Leroy Little Bear and Winona LaDuke's perspectives on All My/Our Relations, and the beloved *pimoa cthulhu* spider who gave birth to the conceptualization of the Chthulucene. The section *On Cacophony and Polyphony* ties soundscapes of capitalism together with Anna Tsing's concept of polyphonic assemblage and Jodi Byrd's cacophony. *On Tranimacy* questions how trans materialities could be imagined in a Chthulucenian epoch and what are the implications of conceptualizing the becoming of tranimals while thinking through animacy. I conclude with *Looping Back* by revisiting the concepts of autopoiesis and sympoiesis and their relation to Indigenous self-determination.

On Cat's Cradle

I begin the analysis of Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kinship in the Chthulucene* by reviewing her concept of the cat's cradle. Donna Haraway's interest in string figuring games focuses primarily on two games: one non-Indigenous (cat's cradle) and the other an Indigenous game (na'atl'o'). The games are intra-actions of thinking, making, worlding and patterning.

Haraway explains: "The partners do not precede the knotting; species of all kinds are consequent upon worldly subject – and object – shaping entanglements" (Haraway, 2016, p. 13). These string figure patterns in their making are ways in which we can understand how certain connections, harmonies or entanglements emerge:

> It matters which ideas we think other ideas with; my thinking or making cat's cradle with na'atl'o' is not an innocent universal gesture, but a risky proposition in relentless historical relational contingency. And these contingencies include abundant histories of conquest, resistance, recuperation, and resurgence. (Haraway, 2016, pp. 14–15)

But does cat's cradle adequately serve Donna Haraway's multispecies companioning well enough to accommodate her proposal of living together? From my perspective, the act of cat's cradling seems to enact the opposite of what I believe

Haraway intends. Let's begin by looking at this game (or metaphor) as a philosophical proposal in and of itself, it's material workings, it's rules. Games have rules and limitations. Limitations form stoppages in the flow of multiplicity. Limitations also create the potential to problem-solve beyond obstacles set in place by such limits; by imagining new ways of becoming that were previously unimaginable until encountering such barriers. A metaphor is both limiting and adrift. The openness of interpreting a metaphor gives it leeway to become multiple in meaning, yet its mercurial nature does not always account for the structures or systems it may encounter nor alternative ways of becoming and mattering. Returning to cat's cradle, we begin with the string, the materiality of the game. It is a loop, one string with no beginning or end. One cusps the space within this loop, while a thread runs ovicular around the parameters of this space. It is a space of potentiality. As a site of relationality, one loops this string around both wrists, pulling and weaving back on itself until the string forms a basic pattern resembling a rectangle with two X's inside. An intra-action[2] takes place between players, material, site of potentiality, pattern making and exchange. A second player pulls and changes the strings, forming a new pattern while taking its entirety in hand. The players go back and forth, exchanging the string loop, each time changing the pattern. The game is not necessarily played by two people alone, others can take over. There is no winner in cat's cradle, the aim is to play as long as you can without stopping. Wherein lies the difficulty of conceptualizing this game is in Haraway's desire to enact an entanglement. The aim of cat's cradle is not to create an entanglement, for a knot spells its end. Cat's cradle works upon principles of symmetry in order to manage flow. What is done by the left hand must be mirrored by the right in order to create a symmetrical pattern. From a philosophical perspective, if we discuss symmetry, we have to discuss Greek classics such as Plato's *Timaeus* (see: Lloyd, 2010) and with this I forfeit my turn. Flow, therefore in this proposal, is hindered not harnessed by an entanglement. If we are to imagine Haraway's multispecies string theory then this lack of ability to engage in the full sense of an entanglement will end far too quickly to be of any fun for Haraway and those of us who wish to play this game. I am with Haraway. I love a good entanglement. Let's stay with the trouble they are pointing out.

Does cat's cradle form a diffractive pattern? Another way of understanding diffraction is through physics, in the occurrence of wave patterns: "Water waves ex-

hibit wave patterns, as do sound waves, and light waves. Diffraction has to do with the way waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading out of waves when they encounter an obstruction" (Barad, 2007, p. 28). One could say that the avoidance of an entanglement in cat's cradle, or the avoidance of obstruction emphasizes flow and an exchange in ethical responsibility (avoiding destruction), while the string-looped patterns pass from one set of hands to the next.

When we think about the string game of cat's cradle and its rules of flow and symmetry with entanglement as an end game, we can understand how difference works in the proposal. Difference without entanglement becomes homogenized, a sort of normalized difference that lacks in problem or tension regarding multiple-worldings. As María Lugones states

> It may be that in this 'world' in which I am so unplayful, I am a different person than in the 'world' in which I am playful. Or it may be that the 'world' in which I am unplayful is constructed in such a way that I could be playful in it. I could practice, even though that 'world' is constructed in such a way that my being playful in it is kind of hard. (1987, p. 13)

What Lugones is talking about is the difficulty in being perceived as playful or feeling at ease in certain "worlds" as a woman of color or a queer person of color. We, as Indigenous folk and people of color, diffract ourselves while moving through various spaces or encountering interference. We are not always afforded simple joy or playfulness in a white or settled "world." We are perceived as being too serious when we address racist humor, for example. We are conversely not taken seriously when being "too queer" or "too feminine" in a misogynist world. The irony of living in a settled world feels unsettling. It feels unsettling to nonhuman and human animals alike. Differences between the experiences of settlers and arrivants (Byrd, 2011) in settled spaces are diffractive. Differences between passing and non-passing in our worldings as trans and gender nonconforming people are also diffractive, as we move through/become fluid. Accessibility can paradoxically feel more fluid in an accommodating space that is the paved product of an otherwise able-bodied, settled society. Were it not for the conceptualization of more accessible spaces, would unsettled terrains remain inaccessible or of great obstacle to

diffract. In our own "private worlds" with like-minded kin, we have the freedom to express unfiltered joy, seriousness and play. It is through the navigation of these different "worlds" in which we simultaneously inhabit that we become diffractive.

On Na'atl'o'

Na'atl'o', the other string game Haraway proposes in her string-figure collaboration, may help in creating the diffraction pattern encountered in an entanglement. Na'atl'o' are Din'eh string games only played in the winter when the spider is asleep. They are single-person string patterns or figures connected to storytelling that are passed down by generations. Na'atl'o' helps remember how Coyote placed Dilyéhé (Pleiades), So'Bidee'é (Star with Horns) and other constellations in the sky. Some of the patterns resemble the stars or movements.

What matters through the collaborative knowledge production proposed by thinking about cat's cradle and na'atl'o' are how these relations are formed. For example, I may learn about na'atl'o' through academic means by researching existing documentation, such as in the way I have footnoted. [3] The other is to ask a Din'eh grandmother, cousin or other family member if she can teach na'atl'o'. Did you bring tobacco and a gift when asking to learn about Spider Woman? Who taught you Din'eh traditions? What is your relationship and investment to community? Another point of contention is that na'atl'o' and Din'eh storytelling (regarding astronomy) is not practiced outside of winter time. Out of respect for these traditions, this should also be practiced by settlers who are engaging with Indigenous knowledge and cultural references. Don't piss off Spider Woman.

In na'atl'o', relationality occurs through speaking-listening not through an exchange of passing the string from one person to another. Collectivity is embodied through the transmission of knowledge and tradition, while singularity is maintained. Entanglements are a regular occurrence. Sometimes, one pattern can easily be manipulated to flow into the next pattern without starting over. Other times, certain patterns do not easily flow into another seamlessly. The pattern is then undone and the player starts over, creating another constellation. Entanglements can occur but are not weighted in the game, they do possess a weight of being ruled upon, they simply are a part of the system. Flow moves through adaptability and contingencies in the game. This creates a possibility for diffraction to occur.

Flow and relationality occur through storytelling. Oral and physical storytelling with your hands. How these two string systems of theoretical worlding meet and the relationality between them are important.

Some of the risks that Haraway implies concern how to be in relation as settlers, how to be in relation as academics, how to be in relation as Indigenous scholars, activists, undocumented migrant settlers, and trans Indigenous or settler human animals in relation with nonhuman animals. "Telling stories together with historically situated critters is fraught with the risks and joys of composing a more livable cosmopolitics" (Haraway, 2016, p. 15). I have not come close to exhausting a list of identity intersections and their possible assemblages. The possibilities are contingent and in constant flux. What needs to be kept in mind are the singular and collective positionalities that are personally embodied. What is my position or relationship to power as both a singular subject and within a collective subjectivity? Are these forces rhizomatically deterritorialized (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987)? Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizome and deterritorialization as such:

> Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. (1987, p. 21)

Further, Deleuze and Guattari state, "Lines of flight or of deterritorialization, becoming-wolf, becoming inhuman, deterritorialized intensities: that is what multiplicity is. To become wolf or to become hole is to deterritorialize oneself following distinct but entangled lines" (1987, p. 32).

Jodi Byrd is critical of the concept of the rhizomatic deterritorialization in relation to the colonialization:

> The maps of settler colonialism were always already proliferative, the nation state's borders were always perforated, and the U.S. lines of flight across the treaties with Indigenous nations were always rhizomatic and fluid rather than hierarchical, linear, and coherent, located not just in the nation-state but within

> the individual settlers and arrivants who saw Indigenous lands as profit, fortune, and equality. In many ways, that is their point. Deleuze and Guattari re/deterritorialize America as the world, coming full circle to find its west in its east and its east in its west, a worlding anew, in Gayatri Spivak's terms, that decenters all static, grounded belongings and locates them instead in becomings: becoming-Indian, becoming-woman, becoming-America. (2011, p. 13)

A key aspect of Byrd's statement is focused on how rhizomatic proliferation in the Americas are entangled with property, material extraction, the labor bodies harnessed within systems of colonial capital, productivity, and profitability. While the rhizome may have theoretically been a more anarcho-philosophical strategy or speculated process that attempted to think or move outside of hierarchical systems of power, it cannot extricate itself from its relation to colonial capitalism and the real and material actions or consequences implicating settlers and arrivants in historical conditions of capital profit. One of the difficulties in using the term arrivant is that it needs to be qualified; to whom is one referring to as an arrivant? The term arrivant needs to be contextualized by being attentive to relations of power and various forms of precarity, specifically in relation to history of slavery, recognizing that not all arrivants profited from Indigenous land's being stolen and privatized.

The deterritorialization of colonial nation states (hegemonic systems) are lateralizing (or flattening) while simultaneously the rhizomatic proliferation of self-determined Indigenous nations and other forms of micropolitical collective assemblage are creating situations that work to decentralize power and propagate multiplicities of non-hierarchical power. Thus, deterritorialization is only partial and specifically targeted towards hegemonic systems, particularly within nation-statehood and coloniality.

Should the focus be aimed at deterritorializing or decentralizing Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, the results would further contribute to the cultural assimilation and absorption of Indigenous communities and nations into colonial systems they actively work to resist. This is already the case throughout colonial history as Byrd has pointed out.

If we are to apply the concept of rhizomatic deterritorialization to the situation of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty of nationhoods nested[4] within colonial nation states (such as Canada and the United States of America), sympoietic

deterritorialization must be qualified. Haraway looks to *sympoiesis*[5] for solutions to more intimate and long-term relations of worlding. "The earth of the ongoing Chthulucene is sympoietic, not autopoietic [. . .]. Autopoietic systems are not closed, spherical, deterministic, or teleological; but they are not quite good enough models for the mortal SF world. Poiesis is symchthonic, sympoietic, always partnered all the way down, with no starting and subsequently interacting 'units'" (2016, p. 33).

Beth Dempster coined the term sympoiesis which was taken from the Greek words for "collective" and "production." Dempster proposed an alternative model for ecosystems to autopoietic systems. Sympoietic systems are characterized as such:

> 1) autopoietic systems have self-defined boundaries, sympoietic systems do not; 2) autopoietic systems are self-produced, sympoietic systems are collectively produced; and, 3) autopoietic systems are organizationally closed, sympoietic systems are organizationally ajar. A range of other characteristics arise from these differences. Autopoietic systems are homeostatic, development oriented, centrally controlled, predictable and efficient. Sympoietic systems are homeorhetic, evolutionary, distributively controlled, unpredictable and adaptive. (Dempster, 2000, p. 1)

From an Indigenous standpoint, sympoiesis faces similar problems to the ones I mentioned above, concerning rhizomatic deterritorialization. How are Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty addressed in a sympoietic system? Agreeably, if sympoiesis implies dismantling nation statehoods in favor of a multiplicity of micropolitical collective assemblages, it is growing healthily. Where it gets into trouble is how it deals with self-defined boundaries. You can't just show up to a conversation that spans hundreds of years (as a settler or otherwise) on the reconciliation of historical colonial genocide and propose that everyone form a collective sympoietic system. There needs to be room for self-determination. Individual Indigenous communities decide what their/our own communities need in both the immediate and long-term. Some communities may even be autopoietic; some are autopoietically matriarchal for example. "In situations in which sovereignties are nested and embedded, one proliferates at the other's expense; the United States and Canada can only come into political being because of Indigenous dispossession. Under

these conditions there cannot be two perfectly equal, robust sovereignties" (Simpson, 2014, p. 12). Another example of the autopoietic is argued by Reese Simpkins (2017) who states that the embodiment of trans* materiality[6] is autopoietic. Reese states that, "[t]rans* temporalities emerge through the cellular processes of self-organising (autopoiesis)", and that these processes subvert chronological time and linearity through unique temporalities in the body (p. 126).

While thinking through these processes of agency and relation, it is helpful to return to Lugones' idea of worlding and differences, so that we may contextualize these variously scaled-examples of autopoietic self-determinacy:

> A "world" in my sense may be an actual society given its dominant culture's description and construction of life, including a construction of the relationships of production, of gender, race, etc. But a "world" can also be such a society given a non-dominant construction, or it can be such a society or a society given an idiosyncratic construction. As we will see it is problematic to say that these are all constructions of the same society. But they are different "worlds." (Lugones, 1987, p. 10)

How does Haraway differentiate "symchthonic" from sympoietic? I will return to the semiotics of "chthonic" shortly. If I were to deconstruct its meaning now, our conversation will diffract once again. For now, I think it is more fruitful to deepen the conversation on Indigenous self-determinacy while sitting with Reese's notion of the autopoiesis of trans* materialities, by understanding how quantum physics operates in Indigenous relationality. I invite Leroy Little Bear to sit with us at this moment, and teach us how Blackfoot quantum physics can help us understand worlding and relationality.

On Indigenous Relationality

In the Indigenous paradigm of All My/Our Relations, all matter and bodies are animate, everything is animate. Animacy can be visualized by what Leroy Little Bear refers to as constant flux. He describes constant flux as energy waves moving through everything. In his 2011 lecture on the three tenets of Indigenous science/philosophy, he stated:

> The first tenet of the native paradigm is what we refer to as constant flux. If you were to imagine this flux is animated, you would see a constant motion or energy waves, light and so on, going back and forth. Things are forever in motion, things are forever changing. There is nothing certain. The only thing that is certain is change. Things are forever moving, things are forever dissolving, reforming, transforming. A second part of the native tenet of flux is flux itself. Everything in existence, everything in creation, consists of energy waves. In classical physics, we talk in terms of matter, particles, subatomic particles. In the native way, we talk in terms of energy waves. Those energy waves are very special because it's those energy waves, not you, that know. All of us are simply combinations of energy waves. Spirit is energy waves. All it means when we die is that particular combination becomes dissipated. Energy waves are still there. A third part of the paradigm is that everything is animate. There is nothing in Blackfoot for instance, that is inanimate. Everything is animate. Everything, those rocks, those trees, those animals all have spirit just like we do as humans. If they all have spirit, that's what we refer to as all my relations. (2011, n.p.)[7]

In Indigenous relationality, everything is animate and therefore everything has the power (Spirit=energy waves) to relate subjectively as beings through Spirit. When we say All My Relations or All Our Relations, we recognize a kinship between all that is, all that was and all that has the potential to become. The notion of time is nonlinear. Everything is moving, changing and flowing through another and another. As Gregory Cajete explains,

> The idea of moving around to look from a different perspective, from the north, the south, the east, and the west, and sometimes from above, below, or from within, is contained in the creative process. Everything is like a hologram; you have to look from different vantage points to understand it. In the Indigenous causational paradigm, movement is relational, or back and forth in a field of relationships, in contrast to Western science's linearity […]. (2000, p. 210)

The wave patterns of diffraction are found in water, sound vibration and light. If we compare this to both Little Bear (Blackfoot) and Cajete's (Tewa) understanding of different Indigenous scientific paradigms of relating, moving through a hologram

of perspectives while in relation is connected to a prism of light or more specifically light waves (energy waves/Spirit) and constant flux.

The vantage of moving within can be related back to Haraway's metaphoric usage of the word diffraction. Diffraction, in Haraway's usage, serves as a replacement for reflection which is objective in its perspective through its mirroring. Diffraction (metaphorically) and diffraction waves (materially) are intra-active in Baradian terms. Karen Barad uses the physics of diffraction (wave patterning) to describe is an alternative method to reflection, such as in Haraway's metaphorical usage of the term, while also connecting the materiality of diffraction within quantum physics. Here entanglements and differences operate on both theoretical and material levels. From this basis, ethical considerations guide and ground theory through a direct relationship with nature. "[D]iffraction is not merely about differences, and certainly not differences in any absolute sense, but about the entangled nature of differences that matter. Significantly, difference is tied up with responsibility […]" (2007, p. 36). Responsibility involves ethics and structures of power dynamics.

If I were to relate this to my own families' traditions, I am reminded of Haudenosaunee wampum belts. Wampum belts are records of agreements made material, by way of relationships between Indigenous nations, settler colonial nation states, by witness and containment of water, and relatives of water. Wampum are beaded belts, strung together to form material records of particular agreements and relationships made and kept between nations. The beads themselves are made from quahog and whelk shells, traded to us by our coastal neighbors. The shell (as a container) becomes a cylindrical bead, that allows the passing of string which connects rows of beads. The water contained materially within these shell beads become agential witnesses to the treaties and agreements made between nation to nation. Shells also acts a microchips (the process of sand to silicon) that store memory. String theory, animacy, agency, diffraction, relationality, data processing, and ethical responsibility come together as wampum.

On Philosophical Kinship

Part of the work of decoloniality within the humanities and sciences is ceasing to rely upon Western philosophy and scientific knowledges as the basis of continual knowledge production within academia. Rather than attempting to replace, repair

or refute Cartesian decapitations of intellect and body, or by relegating Indigenous scholarship to footnotes, settler feminist scholarship needs to begin to actively promote Indigenous scholarship if it is to decolonize itself from its own regimes.

The Three Tenets of Native Science as articulated by Leroy Little Bear (2011), offer one such way of remembering and learning to think through animacy, mattering, relations, kinship, subjectivity, and quantum physics through Blackfoot new materialism. I choose this wording of Blackfoot new materialism, not as an actual suggestion that The Three Tenets of All My Relations are to be assimilated into the whiteness of new materialism, but rather as an example of how co-opting certain words such as "science" or other weighty, imperial words can prove subversive.

Our Indigenous sciences are imbedded within ceremonies, languages, songs, and creation stories. Science is not the exclusive domain of whiteness or heteronormativity, and yet, they are constantly implied as such. I imagine Indigenous feminist (present and future) academic emergences of Two-Spirit new materialist paradigms, Haudenosaunee affect theory, Anishinabek relationality, Din'eh astronomical string theories, and Blackfoot quantum physics, proliferating in academia. I am also mindful as Audra Simpson points out, that some stories are not meant to be told, collected, and distributed within academic contexts or outside of community. Therefore, a politics of refusal (Simpson 2007) – the refusal to have any more of our knowledges colonized – is also necessary at times.

Winona LaDuke, one of many Indigenous protectors of water ancestors of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, in writing about All My Relations, acknowledges that multispecies kinship and relations have long existed before settlement:

> Our relations to each other, our prayers whispered across generations to our relatives, are what bind our cultures together. The protection, teachings, and gifts of our relatives have for generations preserved our families. These relations are honored in ceremony, song, story, and life that keep relations close-to buffalo, sturgeon, salmon, turtles, bears, wolves, and panthers. These are our older relatives – the ones who came before and taught us how to live. Their obliteration by dams, guns, and bounties is an immense loss to Native families and cultures. Their absence may mean that a people sing to a barren river, a caged bear, or buffalo far away. It is the struggle to preserve that which remains and the struggle to recover that characterizes much of Native environmentalism. (LaDuke, 1999, p. 2)

These All My/Our Relations familial assemblages are lived, practiced, remembered, taught, fought for and respected. Imaginings of Indigenous-futurisms, and Afrofuturisms, are important when sharing stories of SF (science fiction) narratives[8].

What I am skeptical about is how deep this level of engagement and familial responsibility will become embodied when Western philosophical schisms of subject and object dominate settler hegemonies and govern nation states. What is it going to take for settlers to decolonize their own belief systems about kinship, property and ownership? If one cannot stop viewing the land that their home rests upon as material to be owned, will they be willing to protect its health with the same urgency as protecting one's own human grandmother or child? How is cultural appropriation considered in the relationality of kinship-forming when one is a settler on colonized land? Donna Haraway shares concern for these dilemmas: "What shape is this kinship and where do these lines connect and disconnect, and so what? What must be cut and what must be tied if multispecies flourishing on earth, including humans and other-than-human beings in kinship, are to have a chance?" (2016, p. 2). A further question she considers addresses Western affiliations to animism:

> [I] have not forgotten that spirit helpers favor their kin. Animism cannot be donned like a magic cape by visitors. Making kin in the ongoing Chthulucene will be more difficult than that, and even the unwilling heirs of colonizers are poorly qualified to set conditions for recognition of kinship. (2016, p. 89)

All cultures, including those coming from Europe have animate pasts. Westerners do not need to look to other cultures in order to find their own roots in animacy. Whether Westerners find it easier to reconcile schisms through science by animating materialist traditions in philosophy or looking to Celtic, Wiccan and other Pagan traditions, one need not look beyond one's own histories for kinship. Yet, there are other kinships we form as well, those of a chosen nature, the preferential familial assemblages.

We form bonds and networks as friends, colleagues, and (non)human animal companions of different sorts. These are the kind of kinships that Haraway is concerned with, kinships that are formed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and between nonhuman and human animals. Settlers need to contempo-

rize their own views of Indigenous people, rather than trapping subjectivities in a colonial time capsule as cultural relics on the brink of extinction, with subjectivities in captivity. "[C]olonial categories and their spatialization entail the erasure of Indigenous subjectivities and territories, making it difficult for Indigenous people to be seen as anything other than colonial subjects within their subjectivity as 'Indians'" (Hunt, 2013, p. 58). Haraway's call to sympoiesis and kinship can be contextualized by a specific problem when questions of belonging and the right to call nonhuman animals kin (to settlers) in the Americas arise.

How can one claim kinship to the land and its inhabitants, in the Americas, when one is a settler? How can settlers embrace Indigenous beliefs without invitation from or membership in Indigenous communities? The answer to this last question is embedded within the question itself. Indigenous communities have our own systems of kinship and community acceptance comes by invitation from within, not from the outside. Haraway does not explicitly answer these questions, though she does acknowledge they are problems of concern to allied settlers with akin politics (how to be a good ally). Instead, Haraway chooses a pigeon for a spirit animal kin to the settler. Pigeons sailed to the Americas with their colonial compatriots from Europe, settling on the shores of Turtle Island and beyond. To Haraway, they embody:

> [T]reasured kin and despised pests, subjects of rescue and of invective, bearers of rights and components of the animal-machine, food and neighbor, targets of extermination and of biotechnological breeding and multiplication, companions in work and play and carriers of disease, contested subjects and objects of "modern progress" and "backward tradition. (2016, p. 15)

Embracing pigeons as kin and taking collective responsibility for such conflictive relationalities are important lessons and practices that Haraway shares with her beloveds. Where it becomes sticky while transiting upon this web of connections is in reference to power animals. While it has become quite commonplace within New Age circles to enact shamanistic practices from various non-western cultures, cultural appropriation needs to be considered. As it was pointed out earlier, Europeans have traditions of kinship with nonhuman animals and other elements of nature.

If we continue transiting along these sticky lines, we encounter Haraway's next beloved, a spider called *pimoa cthulhu*. The *pimoa cthulhu*'s name takes its inspiration from a Goshute word "pimoa" and the science fictional deity named "Cthulhu" conjured in a H. P. Lovecraft story. Cthulhu represents the power of chaos. It is also related to the word "chthonic," thus making Cthulhu an Underworld deity. Cthulhu is a tranimal deity that is said to resemble part octopus, dragon and human caricature who struck both fear and awe in his believers. He is a fictional, mythical creature conjured by artists and academics, both parties whom, in the imaginings of Lovecraft, are presumably white. Those mythologies that have been spun around his origins are written as having transnationally common threads. The cultures depicted by Lovecraft that share common myths of Cthulhu are both said to be queer and people of color. What happens to *pimoa* in the Chthulucene? Without a doubt, Pimoa-Chthulucene has a rather wordy ring to it and using a Goshute word without the permission of Goshute nations is not in alignment with decolonial practices. Haraway's proposal reflects a position that highlights her interest and knowledge of SF – of science fiction, string figuring, and speculative feminism as ways of imagining complex relationalities and worldings that include chaos, underground assemblages and hybridity. Her proposal is to call this epoch the Chthulucene in place of Anthropocene or Capitalocene.

The Anthropocene is a name describing the current epoch which has been significantly affected by human animals, impacting ecosystems and the geology of this planet. The name Anthropocene has been the focus of critique by various scholars who question its anthropocentric perspective, while suggesting that other particularities serve as the crux of these geo-eco-socio shifts, such as the advent of capitalist (Capitalocene) and plantation systems (Plantationocene). In Haraway's Chthulucene:

> To sympoietically renew the biodiverse powers of Terra – that is the sympoietic work and play of the Chthulucene. Specifically, unlike either the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene, the Chthulucene is made up of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen – yet. We are at stake to each other. Unlike the dominant dramas of Anthropocene and Capitalocene discourse, human beings are not the only important actors in the

> Chthulucene, with all other beings able simply to react. The order is rather reversed: human beings are with and of the earth, and the other biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story. (Haraway 2016, p. 59)

A significant problem with proposals of multispecies worldings are their historically anti-Black equations of speciesism/racism. Che Gossett stresses that,

> Black people have historically been portrayed through scientific racism as animal like and this anti-black discourse has overlapped with the ways that the animal has been depicted throughout the course of Western philosophy as the desolate ground upon and against which the human, as a colonial and racial construct, has been defined. (2015, n.p.)

To Gossett, multispecies worldings do not position "animal life against black life" rather they critique and question the perspectives of the authors we form kinships with, in our exercising of articulations in love or through rupturing these discourses and their consequences. Gossett is not pointing to a problem of relationality between nonhuman and human animals, but rather the historically colonial conflation of Black subjects as objects, material, and animals, entrenched in white settler colonialist pasts and presents. I am reminded of the implications discussed earlier on the tendency to focus on projects of rhizomatic deterritorialization as a means of resisting hierarchy, with the risk of this flattening of the plane, becoming an obstruction to the self-determination of Indigenous nations and people of color. I believe this to be one of the major oversights of Deleuzian deterritorialization, its lack of articulation in regards to how race is constructed, thought through, lived through and died through. Are there other ways of assembling that make space for the nuances of intersectional multiplicity?

On Tranimacy

Building on discussions of intersectionality, I can return to where trans* and/or trans become in discourses on animality and animacy. But even now, I feel hesitant to say that there is any one way of approaching what trans materiality means, within or beyond the proposal of a Chthulucene. While trans materialities are not

explicitly discussed in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, I will attempt to think through trans materialities within new materialist discourses beyond the Chthulucene alone. Trans materialities are supported through Deleuzian (2005) and Tsingian (2015) multiplicities, intersections of race, (dis)ability, class, sexuality, gender, animacy, affect, and mattering. The Cthulhu in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* is a tranimal deity, therefore, it opens up discussions on "tranimalities." Tranimalities is a neologism stemming from the word tranimal (trans and animal). In trans studies, words such as "tranimal" and "tranimacy" have become ways to describe relationships between nonhuman and human animals, trans embodiment, and questions relating to agency. In the opening editorial remarks of *Angelaki*'s special edition on tranimalities, Steinbock et al. write, "The composite term of tranimacies enmeshes several everyday and scholarly concepts: transgender, animal, animacy, intimacies" (2017, p. 1).

Although the Cthulhu of Lovecraft is depicted in a malevolent form and distanced from Haraway in her coinage of the Chthulucene, it is nevertheless present in more than one critique of the Chthulucene and I will use it as a way to open up the discussion on how we can imagine where trans and tranimality dwell in these SF webs.

While Donna Haraway does not explore trans* and/or trans explicitly in *Staying with the Trouble*, the Chthulucene could benefit from the queer tranimalities problematized and questioned by Eva Hayward and Mel Y. Chen (2015). Animacy is passed from nonhuman animal material, molecular bodies to human animal bodies. One such example involves hormones that are manufactured using animal products. Hayward states, "[P]remarin (an industrially produced estrogen sourced from pregnant mares, hence the name) is biochemically involved in the transitioning of some trans*women. In a very material way, these trans*women are kinds of 'tranimalities'" (2015, p. 320).

If we follow this path of inquiry, the consumption of all animal products (in hormonal usage or meat consumption in general), the ethics that serve or are declined in protecting these nonhuman animals, and the becoming of tranimals form a sticky, tentacular web of relationality, kinship and sacrifice. Sacrifice happens through abstaining from or executing an animate body for the benefit of another. Something will be sacrificed. A vegan trans person may decide to abstain from this type of hormone treatment that involves animal products, seeking alternative

methods such as synthetic hormones, herbal alternatives, or by rejecting the use of hormones altogether. The use of synthetic hormonal treatment as well as meat consumption would result in becoming a tranimal. Abstinence of hormonal treatment is also a way of politically rejecting normativities – capitalist normativity or heteronormativity. Every moment that the human animal consumes food, they are becoming tranimals of various sort. This does not excuse the violence of industry. Rather it emphasizes the importance of empathy, of a reminder of life and death and how we are in a continual participation of its cycles and that we must weigh our choices in all matters of relationality, in this constant flux of tranimality. Philosophically, there are overlaps with Buddhism in this discussion on the sensitivity and respect of all living beings, but a constant flux of becoming tranimals through consumption and absorption of animacies may find more kinships with shamanic, pagan and other medicine traditions, although I also believe that it traverses elsewhere into spaces undefined as such. If, as Leroy Little Bear states, constant flux is animated in the form of energy waves, and all matter consists of energy waves, then that which separates one body from the next, one form from another, is as permeating and discriminant as the skin that both expels sweat and wicks the rain. Kinships are as permeating and discriminant as the membranes that regulate the flows that pass through them. Tranimating is the movement of animacy, of energy waves. Little Bear also states that all matter is in constant flux. Therefore, tranimacy is always occurring, constantly changing and passing through bodies. If the bodies of nonhuman and human animals are constantly becoming different tranimals through the relationality of each other's consumption and reproduction, then kinships need to be considered as processes that affect the wellbeing of many bodies in assemblage and a singular embodiment of a tranimal. If all bodies are tranimals, then there are no separations between subject and object. This may appear to be sympoietic and lacking in boundaries, however, is neither innocent nor disconnected from superimposed formations of necropolitical liquid control.

With tranimacy comes an inescapable consequence of being relationally tied to the death of one form or another. While it can be argued that energy waves continue to move through all matter in constant flux and that life force never actually dies but is transferred from body-to-body-to-body, it does not excuse us from our relationship to the death or evacuation of animacy in other bodies. As Preciado acknowledges in an auto-biographic account, "Each time I give myself a dose of

testosterone, I agree to this pact. I kill the blue whale; I cut the throat of the bull at the slaughterhouse; I take the testicles of the prisoner condemned to death. I become the blue whale, the bull, the prisoner. I draft a contract whereby my desire is fed by – and retroactively feeds – global channels that transform living cells into capital" (2013, p. 163).

Further, as Paul Preciado points out, the space inside the tranimate body becomes a site of micro-control:

> A common trait of the new soft technologies of micro-control is that they take the form of the body; they control by transforming into "body", until they become inseparable and indistinguishable from it. Soft technologies become the stuff of subjectivity. Here the body no longer inhabits disciplinary spaces, but is inhabited by them. The bio-molecular and organic structure of the body is a last resort for these control systems. This moment contains all the horror and exaltation of the body's political potential. (Preciado, 2008, p. 110)

This control is liquid:

> We live in an era of proliferating biomolecular, digital and high-speed technologies; of the soft, light, slimy and jelly technologies; of the injectable, inhalable, and incorporable technologies. Testosterone gel, the pill and psycho-tropics all belong to this set of soft technologies. We are heavily involved in something that can be called […] a sophisticated form of "liquid" control. (2008, p. 110)

How liquid control comes into play with the Chthulucene can be traced within the work of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark. Her 1973 work, *Baba antropofágica*[9] (anthropophagical dribble) is a performance related to the string figures and spidery tales that Haraway finds dear. The performance begins with a figure, a human-animal lying on the floor. The figure is surrounded by a group of people who, like spiders, begin to regurgitate spittled-strings from their mouths, laying a tangled, saliva-infused collective web upon the figure until it forms a cocoon enveloping the body.

As the collective attempts to regurgitate the lines of liquid control, evacuating their bodies of its presence, their internal space becomes attached to the body lay-

ing as a corpse, awaiting transformation. The relationalities of the group are linked both internally and externally. The group's actions transform the body's performativity of inaction, while the performance of the one lying on the floor is not without its own complicity to an enactment of death or passivity. By lying in wait, the body (either passive or performing death) chooses to perform. It awaits transformation into tranimal, while being tied to a collective process of liquid control. These are inseparable binds that both the Chthulucene and trans materialities must face. "Staying with the trouble" means more than attempting to take ethical responsibility. It requires coming to terms with our own complicity in an inescapable web of material cannibalism (anthropophagy) that is tied not only to Capitalism, but to the process of entropy that we are very much a part of whether we accept it or not. We can attempt to philosophize our way out of it through SF imaginary (subaltern-foregrounding, settler-Indigenous friendships), jovial spaces of love. As the words of María Lugones return to memory, I would be practicing in a world, in a Chthulucene, that is constructed in such a way that makes it hard to be playful without being simultaneously violent – violent to intersectional trans*/trans, cis-gendered female, disabled, queer, Indigenous, migrant, people of color, (non)human animal bodies.

Looping Back

It is one thing to think about lines of string figures, but another to read between metaphorical lines of speculative imagination in order to articulate their precise locations. While playing string games in the Chthulucene, I have come to understand what some of the troubles are that haunt Donna Haraway's thoughts and my own. The kinships are not all beloved and we ourselves are not always beloved towards our relations, yet we are continually interdependent upon each other, in the immediate present and down the line. Autopoiesis is still necessary for Indigenous self-determination. The processes of sympoiesis (making-with) and autopoiesis (self-determination) are therefore both necessary in order for multiple differences to emerge, cycle, regenerate, and move. The same can be said for tranimacies that are similarly sympoietic in their relations between nonhuman and human animals. Tranimacies are also precarious in their regard to agency; every decision we make is one that must weigh acts of death and vitality. Whether it is in

the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene or Chthulucene, our participation in systems of control and depletion cannot be fully deprogrammed in times of crisis or in imagining. The more we understand the complexity of relationality, the more we find ourselves ensnared in violence even through seemingly playful games of imaginative kinships.

By staying with Donna Haraway in following her string figure theories of relating, I am reminded of the quahog and whelk wampum beads that hold treaties and agreements together. These relations are remembered and materialized, bound together through the diffractive mediary of wampum belts. To the settler they appear decorative, but to us they are living records of our ties, our agencies, our treaties, our kinships, our alliances, and our promises. We always begin with the medicines before stories can be shared, and not all stories are medicine for everyone's consumption.

Endnotes

1 From Donna Haraway's "Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse." Diffraction is an attempt to make differences while being attentive to interactions, interference, and reinforcement.

2 "The neologism 'intra-action' signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual 'interaction,' which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action." (Barad, 2007, p. 33)

3 Video found online as part of the Endangered Language Project (2008) "Navajo String Games by Grandma Margaret." Retrieved Dec. 20, 2016 from http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/6085/samples/4407.

4 Referring to "nested sovereignty" by Audra Simpson (2014, p. 116).

5 Sympoiesis refers to a system that is comprised of sym- (together) and poiesis (creation, production).

6 See: "Autopoiesis emerges as an affective realm, a dimension of trans*ed materiality and a process of trans* assemblages, all of which are integral in the production of space and time." (Simpkins, 2017, p. 124).

7 On March 24, 2011, Leroy Little Bear, founding Director of Harvard University's Native American Studies program, gave a lecture at Arizona State University entitled, "Native Science and Western Science: Possibilities for Collaboration." This is a transcription of part of his lecture written by me while watching and listening to it in an archived form, through video documentation. Recorded on March 24, 2011 at the Heard Museum, Phoenix, Ari-

zona. File retrieved June 20, 2017 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycQtQZ9y3lc

8 Haraway's term SF is used metaphorically to refer to different concepts i.e. string figuring, speculative feminism, and science fiction. They operate as ways of imagining the conviviality and understanding of multispecies relationality.

9 Suely Rolnik defines anthropophagical thinking as an 'active micropolitics' that is 'heterogenetic-relational-immanent-perspectivist' in its ethical compass. Anthropophalogocentric thinking is a 'reactive micropolitics' that is 'homogenetic-identitarian-colonial-capitalistic' in its moral compass. S. Rolnik, "Under the Same Sun: The Unknown Universe. Suely Rolnik Deconstructs the Colonial Unconscious." Retrieved on March 4, 2017 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yASMCTAHiVM.

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Trans-speaking Voice-lessness: A Fictocritical Essay

David Azul

ABSTRACT: How to emerge from a condition of not-being-able-to-speak-and-not-being-heard-with-what-one-has-to-say if the nature of one's voice-lessness cannot be explored on the basis of the worldview in which one has been raised and with the methods of knowledge production in which one has been trained?

How to imagine ever coming to voice if one is unable to recognize oneself in the sex category to which one has been allocated at birth and if most listeners regard the vocal embodiment of an unambiguously female or male gender as a necessary precondition for paying attention to an utterance as (potentially intelligible, human) speech?

In this piece, I explore these and related questions via a hybrid mode of text production that I call trans-speaking. It draws on: memories entries in dictionaries and speech-language pathology textbooks; poststructuralist, posthumanist and transgender studies theories; and fictocritical writing practices. In a part imaginative, part theoretical account, a first person narrator revisits some of the scenes from their life; being addressed and spoken about; growing up in and becoming disenchanted with the medico-scientific worldview; working as a voice clinician; receiving and responding to reviewers' comments on their work; applying for a change of name and gender entry; engaging with medical approaches to gender transitioning. These textual re-enactments that are interwoven with elaborations on key theoretical concepts are designed to invite readers to consider the following suggestion: What is taken for granted in some academic and everyday discourses as the mere givenness of human properties (e.g. a person's status as a subject, their gender/sex, body, agency) are produced and transformed by an entanglement of discursive-material forces, which operate as constraints on the notion and practice of voice in its material and metaphorical senses?

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KEYWORDS: Voice, trans embodiments, transgressing disciplinary boundaries, exclusionary practices, material-discursive agency

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Trans-speaking[1–3] voice-lessness:[4–9] A fictocritical[10] essay

1 TRANS-SPEAKING: A speaking that "explores categorical crossings, leakages, and slips of all sorts" (Stryker, Currah, & Moor, 2008, p. 11).

2 HYPHEN: "A short dash or line (-) used to connect two words together as a compound … or to divide a word into parts for etymological or other purposes" (*The Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED) Online*, 2017).

The hyphen as it is used here "marks the difference between the implied nominalism of 'trans' and the explicit relationality of 'trans-,' which remains open-ended and resists premature foreclosure by attachment to any single suffix" (Stryker, Currah, & Moor, 2008, p. 11). Gender/sex, subjectivity, voice (in speech and writing), embodiment, disciplinary languages, practices and genres are the main analytical categories whose boundaries I will explore and transgress in this piece.

3 Speaking: While speech is at times understood as "the natural exercise of the vocal organs" (*OED Online*, 2017), suggesting that it is "produced by nature", "inherent in the very constitution of a person … not acquired or assumed" (ibid.), I will make an attempt at demonstrating in this piece that speaking, writing and other modes of voice production and reception, such as, singing, humming, signing, hearing, listening and reading, are practices that cannot be unambiguously located in the realms of nature, biology or materiality or in the speaker's body.

As phonetics – the science of speech sounds – and speech-language pathology – the field into which I teach and whose professional members are specialised in the assessment and treatment of communication difficulties (voice, speech, language, hearing) – are yet to become receptive towards critical interventions that are produced in the Humanities or Social Sciences. The discourses that are rehearsed in professional and academic practices are still based on a "naïve materialism in which 'the body' appears as a fleshly substrate that simply is prior to or in excess of its regulation" (Sullivan & Murray, 2009, p. 1).

Put differently, in speech-language pathology, theoretical work that is produced outside the discipline and its medico-scientific allies (such as, anatomy, physiology, phonetics, psychology, neurology, psychiatry, phoniatrics and other medical specialties) is not given the attention it deserves. For instance, I doubt that the majority of my colleagues would immediately know what I mean when I say that much of the clinical research conducted in the area that currently interests me most (the intersections of notions and practices of voice and gender) is informed by traditional realist, biologically determinist and representationalist beliefs. I also do not think that any of the turns (linguistic, semiotic, interpretative, cultural) Karen Barad mentions in the introduction to her "materialist and posthumanist reworking of the notion of performativity" (2003, p. 811) have yet affected speech-language pathology or that the notions and practices of social constructivism and performativity have been exposed to sufficient scrutiny so far or that they have been widely implemented in speech-language pathology research.

While one could argue that there are a range of matters that concern speech-language pathologists, contemporary feminist and transgender studies theorists alike (e.g. discourses, practices, performances, actions, agencies, epistemologies, ontologies, materialities, to name a few), these scholars/practitioners in their diverse positionings approach these matters of concern from different angles, with

different languages/terminologies and using different material(izing) practices. While new materialist, feminist technoscience and transgender studies scholars can draw on various histories of attempts at dealing with versions of "old" materialisms, epistemologies and methodologies from within their own fields of interdisciplinary practice, speech-language pathologists and other medico-scientifically oriented voice researchers and clinicians are yet to recognize the important contribution an engagement with critical theories of any orientation could make to their practice.

This makes it hard to gather an audience or readership for work that engages with the important tasks of facilitating transdisciplinary cross-fertilization and a "refiguring [of] the material-discursive field of possibilities" (Barad, 2003, p. 823) within speech-language pathology practices. I have attempted trans-speaking in this regard – many years ago, maybe not carefully crafted enough at the time but certainly untimely, as I am able to see now – but it was dismissed by the gatekeepers of the discipline as unintelligible and not relevant for a clinical research focus.

4 VOICE: "[S]ound produced by the vibration of the vocal folds and modified by the resonators" (Nicolisi, Harryman, & Kresheck, 2004, p. 296).

"The voice carries not only linguistic meaning, but also personality traits and discrete emotions" (Tanner, 2006, p. 181).

"The voice reveals the inner self. It is a reflection of the personality of the individual" (Colton, Casper, & Leonard, 2011, p. 2).

"Through it, our size, height, weight, physique, sex, age, and occupation, often even sexual orientation, can be detected. The voice is a stethoscope, and transmits information not only about anatomical abnormalities but even illnesses" (Karpf, 2006, p. 10).

In these short passages taken from the medico-scientific voice literature, the human voice is presented as a similarly biologized but more specialized subspecies of speech. While speech is seen as capable of the "oral expression of thought or feeling" (*OED Online*, 2017), voice is "regarded as characteristic of an individual person" (ibid.) and capable of "represent[ing] the person or being who produces it" (ibid.). Voice is constructed as an instance that provides detailed and transparent insight into sub-aspects of the speaker's prediscursively positioned identity and body, including an assessment of the speaker's preferences

and their physical and mental condition. This unquestioned link between voice, self-expression, health and wellbeing (or lack thereof) and the oversimplified conceptualization of the components and workings of this construction are key problematics whose damaging effects I will attempt to demonstrate and destabilize in this piece.

5 SOUND: "Air wave or vibration that causes a sensory stimulation of the auditory mechanism" (Nicolisi, Harryman, & Kresheck, 2004, p. 253).

6 AUDITION: "The sense or act of hearing" (Nicolisi, Harryman, & Kresheck, 2004, p. 31).

7 HEARING: "The sense, receptive in nature through which spoken language is received by response to sound pressure waves. The ears, the auditory nerve and the brain are involved in the process of hearing" (Nicolisi, Harryman, & Kresheck, 2004, p. 127).

When following up on the implications of considering voice in the material sense as sound, it becomes apparent that the notions and practices of phonation, vibration, resonance, amplification, sensation, hearing and listening, of performance, perception, interpretation and understanding are interlaced, whereby the voice's transmission of "essential clues about who we are" (Karpf, 2006) is interrupted, taken over by others and guided on different paths. These are the key practices that cause a disruption to the traditional notion of voice production, which is so often described as a biologically controlled or behaviourally controllable mechanism. I regard these practices and their effects as promising supports for my project of re-considering, -writing and -speaking voice-lessness.

Due to the requirements of *GJSS*, my speaking appears as writing. Rather than providing a rendering of the text in ready-made audible form, shaped by the specific configurations of one voice organ, this mode of presentation asks readers to perform the text following their own notion and practice of voice, inviting them to multiply and diversify the readings into which a piece of writing can be transformed.

8 LESSNESS: "The quality or condition of being less; inferiority" (*OED Online*, 2017).

9 Voice-lessness (A-phonia): "Complete loss of voice as a result of hysteria (conversion), growths, paralysis, disease, or overuse of the vocal folds" (Nicolisi, Harryman, & Kresheck, 2004, p. 335).

"Within the category of aphonia falls a considerable variety of whispers: pure or noiseless; harsh, sharp, or piercing, intermittent high-pitched squeaks and squeals; moments of normal voice" (Aronson & Bless, 2009, p. 179).

"The most extreme and incapacitating conversion voice disorder is muteness or mutism, in which the patient neither whispers nor articulates, or may articulate without exhalation. Entering the room with notebook and pencil, they write their questions and answers, and although unaware of what they are revealing, involuntarily cough, showing their normal vocal fold adduction" (ibid.).

Just as in the term "trans-speaking" also in "voice-lessness", "the hyphen matters a great deal" (Stryker, Currah, & Moor, 2008, p. 11). At this point, it draws attention to the composite structure of a-phonia, the replaceability of its components (such as in a-phasia, a-plasia, dys-phonia, diplo-phonia, face-lessness, taste-lessness) and the mutual dependency of notions of "voice" (also commonly understood in the metaphorical senses of modes of expression or representation, point of view, control, influence and agency) and "lessness" (also: of smaller dimension, lower condition, rank) or the prefix "a-" (without, not).

Note how the "normal" tends to sneak into descriptions" of the a-phonic listed above. I read this as a (most likely inadvertent) display of the work needed to uphold the porous boundaries between (healthy) voice-d and (disordered) voice-less productions. Following on from this thought, a-phonia as it is defined in the clinical voice literature may also be conceptualized as the temporary outcome of exclusionary practices of abjection, which serve "to maintain or reinforce boundaries that are threatened" (Philipps, 2014, p. 19). Certain voices are thereby rendered "unintelligible or beyond classification" (ibid.) and their "materiality is understood not to 'matter'" (Costera Meijer & Prins, 1998, p. 281).

From this emerge the following questions, pervading this piece right from the start. How could vibrations of air molecules of all kinds, emerging from voice production devices of any shape and form be given a discursive and audibly material life?

How could the effects of abjection be transformed into a strategic assemblage of a new mode of voicing, "regulated by different codes of intelligibility" (Stryker, 2006, p. 253)?

10 FICTOCRITICAL: For Kerr, fictocritical writing is a "kind of cyborg[11] writing which takes place somewhere in among/between criticism, autobiography and fiction … Like the cyborg's oxymoronic fleshly metal (for example) this kind of writing is not decisively any one thing" (Kerr, 1995, p. 94).

Smith conceptualizes fictocritical writing practices as an example of "'creative-critical hybrids' … Such hybrid works contest the idea that creative work is only imaginative, and critical work only interpretive and discursive, and point to their symbiosis. They highlight the intellectual work that creative writing undertakes, and the way it engages with philosophical, cultural and political systems of thought. At the same time they suggest ways in which critical writing can break out of its conventions, and be enlivened through the adoption of creative writing techniques" (Smith, 2014, p. 331).

"Fictocriticism, as an alternative model of knowledge production which foregrounds issues of relativity, hybridisation, contradiction and uncertainty by defamiliarising the conventions of genre, enacts the process of thought, of learning, of writing and reading, and the 'digestion' (or non-digestion) of knowledge … fictocriticism can expose the underbelly of intellectual endeavour, namely the inadequacy of language as a site of knowledge" (Brewster, 1995, p. 90).

For samples of fictocritical work, see e.g. the work listed under note 24, Barthes (2002 [1977]), DuPlessis (1990), Gibbs (2003), Kerr & Nettelbeck (1998).

The arrangement of the textual fragments that are assembled in this piece is based on an image of going hand in hand, which resonates with my commitment to a notion of text production that depends on and is sustained by an unlimited variety of previous writings, transtextual references, and allusions (see also, Scheidt, 2007). What I imagine as a continuous movement of interweaving brings closer together and dissolves the borders of what is traditionally analysed as different parts of a text (such as, footnotes, glossary and main text) and kinds of writing (such as, autobiographical, creative, and critical writing or writing in different national and disciplinary languages). This hybrid ensemble suggests a re-imagination of established writing and reading practices as a strategy of meaning making that resists a forceful disentanglement of textual weavings and upsets the tendency to organize approaches to knowledge production and representation in a hierarchical manner (which privileges the linear over the meandering, the allegedly factual over the

imaginative, and the supposedly general or universal over the idiosyncratic).

11 CYBORG: "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway, 1991 [1985], p. 149).

*

In the BEGINNING[12] there were WORDS. I[13] do not know who uttered them first and when. Like in a game of whisper down the lane, these words were quickly passed from person to person. They were repeated so many times that it looked for a while as if they had been successful in asserting what can only be called a superficial imposition as the truth about this BODY.[14] It had just left a space inside another body that is often seen as a paradise of safety and innocence even though influences of various kinds can easily pass through flesh and shape the not yet born.

The words were uttered in German and might have sounded like this in the beginning of the game of whisper down the lane: "Es ist ein Mädchen!" ("It's a girl!"). And then these words proliferated, giving birth to other words: two given names chosen from one of the two lists compiled by my parents in anticipation, kinship terminology, pronouns, and later: formal forms of address. All referring back to the first appellation that took place in a hospital, at an earlier time understood as a "house or hostel for the reception and entertainment of pilgrims, travellers, and strangers" (*OED Online*, 2017), now, the acme of the medical gaze.

12 BEGINNING: If we consider that SPEECH ACTS[15] and other SOMATECHNICAL[16] forces have been around and forming us before we were born, don't we have to abandon the idea of beginning in relation to those moments when writers lift their pens or start their computers, speakers move their hands or open their mouths, listeners lend their ears or other forms of ATTENTIVE SENSIBILITY,[17] and readers direct their touch or gaze at the page?

Is the air I am about to push through this voice box not already vibrating?

Is what appears as the white page in front of me not humming with squiggles that are constantly interweaving its fibres?

Are the noises, voices, and silences that are performed in conversation not already ensnarled in ongoing processes of signification?

Who or what is making (sense of) this text?

Which forces constitute and shape the DISCURSIVE PRACTICES/ APPARATUSES 18 that are at work?

13 I: When I write or speak (including in the first person), I do so from the position of a stranger who speaks and writes from and to ATOPIA[19] and for whom there is no familiarity to be found in linguistic practices. I tend to look for guidance regarding my predicament in dictionaries, searching for explanations and translations of meanings and illustrative examples.

For instance, the word "I", so the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells me, is "used by the speaker or writer referring to himself or herself", or refers to "a self, a person identical with oneself", or "that which is conscious of itself" (*OED Online*, 2017).

Because I cannot recognize the subject position from which I speak in these definitions, readers and listeners need to know that it won't be a me in these senses who speaks when I say "I".

14 BODY: Imagine, how I, the speaker, narrator, writer, stand in front of you and point with both hands to the assemblage of bones and flesh from which the speaking, the story, the writing emerge.

Why is it that I do not refer to this body as mine?

The process of writing this piece helped me realize that right from the start, (human, non-human, more-than-human, cyborgian) others have brought this body into being, shaped its form, sense, and meaning. This is how I came to know – this body is not mine, I am not this body.

15 SPEECH ACTS: I thank lann hornscheidt for reminding me that language, which speech-language pathologists traditionally conceive as an incorporeal and unauthored system that precedes meaning-making practices and as a trustworthy guiding force enabling communication between people, is constituted by speech acts (hornscheidt, 2012). As soon as we direct our attention at language as a doing (however, a doing that is conceptualized in the sense of the very Butlerian-Baradian performativity that informs this piece) we open a space for a critique of the normative power that the arrangements of some speech acts have managed to assume (for instance, in the shape of dictionaries, grammars, national languages,

genres, or academic disciplines) and widen our imagination of how this poststructuralist-posthumanist doing could be done differently.

16 SOMATECHNICS: The term somatechnics highlights "the notion of a chiasmatic interdependence of soma and techné: of bodily-being (or corporalities) as always already technologized and technologies as always already enfleshed" (Sullivan & Murray, 2009, p. 3).

Technés are "techniques and/or orientations (ways of seeing, [hearing, listening], knowing, feeling, moving, being, acting and so on) which are learned within a particular tradition or ontological context (are, in other words, situated) and function (often tacitly)" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 302).

"[T]echnés are not something we add or apply to the body, nor are they tools the embodied self employs to its own ends. Rather, technés are the dynamic means in and through which corporealities are crafted, that is, continuously engendered in relation to others and to a world" (Sullivan & Murray, 2009, p. 3).

17 ATTENTIVE SENSIBILITY: I thank Wibke Straube for introducing me to the notion of "attentive sensibility" as an alternative to "hearing" and for alerting me to the risk of uncritically reproducing ableist understandings of communication practices in writing when referring only to some body parts or technologies people may use to support their sense and meaning making (Straube, 2014).

Although I do not think that we have enough control over linguistic practices and their effects so that it would be possible to use language in a way that is generally perceived as inclusive of all ways of being in the world and as avoiding all forms of discrimination, marginalisation, or exclusion that are thinkable and that are enacted in everyday encounters, I consider it important to reflect on these issues and to make an attempt at addressing and responding to them in speaking and writing.

My writing will necessarily be affected by my blind spots, the matters of concern I am currently unable to take into account, the issues I have decided to spotlight, and those I cannot apprehend or show properly. The readings of this paper will, in turn, be shaped by the readers' amplification, silencing, and distortion practices and will result in clashes with or extensions of my intentions (what I had in mind, what I wanted to say, what I think is there on the page in black and white).

The narrative that is woven into this piece picks up on this understanding of a general unreliability of speech acting and unpredictability of its effects. This condition affects all characters who appear in the paper (including the first person narrator) and all topics that are addressed and presents as a continuing challenge for all attempts at improving how we make sense and meaning, irrespective of from which subjective, theoretical, disciplinary, or professional positioning they are pursued.

18 DISCURSIVE PRACTICES/APPARATUSES:

> According to Foucault, discursive practices are the local sociohistorical material conditions that enable and constrain disciplinary knowledge practices such as speaking, writing, thinking, calculating, measuring, filtering and concentrating. Discursive practices produce, rather than merely describe, the 'subjects' and 'objects' of knowledge practices. (Barad, 2003, p. 819)

"For Bohr, apparatuses are particular physical arrangements that give meaning to certain concepts to the exclusion of others" (Barad, 2003, p. 819).

"Apparatuses are not pre-existing or fixed entities; they are themselves constituted through particular practices that are perpetually open to rearrangements, rearticulations, and other reworkings" (Barad, 1998, n.p.).

"[T]he material dimension of regulatory apparatuses … is indissociable from its discursive dimension" (Barad, 1998, n.p.).

Accordingly, VOCAL APPARATUSES cannot be understood as biologically determined voice organs (as the clinical voice literature claims) but need to be reconceptualised as never fully determinable inextricably entangled discursive-material, somatechnical practices (which include speaking, listening and observations practices, such as, acoustical, perceptual and instrumental voice analyses and the norms and MATERIAL ARRANGEMENTS[20] that structure these). These practices constrain what counts, is produced and is heard as voice and who or what is considered a voice producer.

19 ATOPIA: "[*A*]*topia* resists description, definition, language … every attribute is false, painful, erroneous, awkward: … [atopia] is *unqualifiable*" (Barthes, 2002 [1977], p. 35).

20 MATERIAL ARRANGEMENTS: For instance, room acoustics, air quality, background noises, use of amplification devices, voice prostheses or hearing aids, exposure of human speakers and listeners to drugs (such as, hormones, nicotine, alcohol, ototoxic or mind-altering substances) that affect their speaking or listening performance.

*

Meanwhile, the body is able to stand and walk but not yet capable of taking a stand and walking away from those material-discursive practices that threaten to limit its possible shapes and movements to a choice of two.

How to imagine ever coming to voice if one is unable to recognize oneself in the sex category to which one has been allocated at birth and if embodying an unambiguously female or male gender is widely regarded as a necessary precondition for the adoption of a subject position and consequently any form of "human" (rather than "non-human" or "monstrous ") expression? (Butler, 1999 [1990]). (In my experience, it can still be an uphill battle to argue for the use of gender diversity inclusive pronouns, such as the singular "they", in manuscripts and author bio notes, even in spaces or in conversation with people committed to "gender inclusive" or "gender sensitive" practices).

How to avoid approaching other people by dint of the very gender binary frame, which renders abject, rejects from the discursive-material space, this body and me and in which, they, too, might not find a place for themselves? (For instance, would "my mother", "the shop assistant", or "the magistrate" who will appear below, prefer to be brought into being with words different from the ones I have chosen to use?)

What keeps me from asking the people I encounter: How do you position yourself with regards to this unwieldy and problematic categorisation called gender and how would you like me to address and refer to you?

What keeps us from adding a question to that effect (understood as genuine inquiry) to our repertoire of courtesy rituals (as it is increasingly implemented at conferences and workshops dedicated to gender diversity but not yet regularly practised in the everyday encounters I have witnessed so far)?

*

"Sie ist ein Mädchen" ("She is a girl"). My mother corrects the sales strategy of a shop assistant who has spent the last minute telling us that the jacket I have cho-

sen is just the right thing for a boy to wear because it is so durable. The shop assistant blushes and apologises many times before she says that the jacket is also great to wear for girls who like playing sports.

In writing, I see myself wearing this padded hooded jacket and its summer version, a security uniform made from tough cotton, day and night. I reconfigure the image of these jackets as a whole body armour which I had hoped would help ward off or at least cushion the incessant blows that were dealt to my emerging sense of the kind of creature I imagined myself to be. At the time, I had no access to concepts, theories, words, discursive figurations or physical arrangements that would have been potentially suitable for countering these blows (that palmed themselves off as merely linguistic) on kindred terms.

Instead, I resorted to using those textile fabrics that I believed to consist of fixed substances as protective bandages to help heal the wounds I had already sustained and to add a tough layer onto my sensitive skin to prevent future assaults from affecting me too deeply.

Today, I know that no matter how solid the outward layer one puts on appears, it won't offer protection against the piercing exclusionary effects of bigenderism and cisnormativity. Also, inevitably, toughening one's bodily surface will further constrain the range of one's possible shapes and movements and aggravate one's sense of being trapped in a cage some of whose bars one has forged oneself.

This is what I see as the core of the issue: The widespread habit of binarily gendering people's bodies/voices the instance they come into sight/within earshot and of simultaneously extending this classification to the entire person in their past, present, and future embodiments.

What do we ourselves know about the sex chromosomes, hormone levels, distribution and functioning of hormone receptors, on which the sexual differentiation of our bodies and voices is said to depend (see e.g. Abitbol, 2006)?

What do we know about what other people make of us?

What is it that makes people feel so confident of their own assumptions and expectations in relation to other people's somatechnical positionings and configurations that they think they can afford to continue – without hesitation – with the customary practice of maling or femaling the other?

What else is left of someone, one might ask, that is not affected by this violent imposition?

*

At that time, I am still young enough to hold my mother's hand for support and protection. It is a speech-language pathologist's and a medical doctor's wife's hand of which I believe that it will guarantee the safeguarding of my health for the rest of my life. However, this childhood belief notwithstanding, a protracted encounter with a complex network of forces (impossible to say on the spot from where they originated and of which nature they were) infests this body and me with voice-lessness (a-phonia).

Had this body-mind (as voice organ) been affected in such a way that its delicate components had gotten deranged, damaged, destabilised, reducing its voice to no more than a puff?

Had the various possible phonees[21] (e.g. listeners, readers, but also recording, acoustic analysis and inspection devices that are used to visualize larynges and the functioning of vocal folds) failed to attend to and make sense of the fluctuations of air molecules that have been emanating from this body's mouth?

Or was this voice inaudible due to "one vast, composite act of invalidation and erasure" (Stryker, 2006, pp. 250–251)?

21 Phonee: invented word: some-one/thing who/which is exposed to vocal sounds

*

Plot summary: Twenty years of not-being-heard-with-what-I-had-to-say make me follow my mother's model. I enrol in speech-language pathology and later specialise in what this profession regards as "voice disorders". Since then I have found myself being preoccupied with scrutinizing the motives for this precarious decision.

Had my mother been successful in passing on to me her uncompromising desire for helping others?

Had I hoped to gain the skills for one day being able to rid the world from a-phonia?

Or had speech-language pathology seen in me the ideal candidate for the position of mouthpiece of medico-scientism and succeeded in enlisting me?

*

After 20 years of participant observation I can report that working in the field of hu-

man communication sciences is the perfect choice for any body wanting to keep their voice-lessness as is. Because medico-scientific voice researchers and clinicians are required to keep up the appearance of an objective and unaffected stance towards what they encounter,[22] they are compelled to put a jacket on and cover their faces with a mask that traps unscientific utterances and neutralizes them in a stream of white noise that emerges from its front. While a text-to-speech engine instructs research participants or clients to execute vocal tasks, the voice specialist takes a seat behind a fortress of technical equipment that will take recordings and calculate acoustical properties of those aspects of the medico-scientific construct of the human voice that are measurable with the help of computer software.[23]

22 This belief in objectivity in the traditional sense goes so far that using the first person singular "I" to refer to the author of a paper is considered inappropriate in many speech-language pathology journals. Compliance with this rule will be enforced by the editing team and may become the decisive factor whether or not a manuscript (even if it has already been accepted) will be published.

23 How to emerge from a condition of not-being-able-to-speak-and-not-being-heard-with-what-one-has-to-say if the nature of one's voice-lessness cannot be explored with the methods of knowledge production in which one has been trained and if the promises of one's coming to voice cannot be accommodated within the constraints of the worldview according to which one has been raised?

The medico-scientific worldview with its inherent binary classification practices is firmly built into the observation and analysis instruments that are part of everyday clinical practice. For instance, some types of acoustical analysis software will only run if voice samples have been (automatically or manually) categorized as either female or male prior to the analysis. This setting triggers the uploading of sex specific normative ranges, which limit the variability of measurements and shape the interpretation of the data. In other words, these examples of material-discursive entanglements that produce medico-scientific vocal apparatuses demonstrate how the silencing of any attempts at trans-speaking is further amplified by systematically prioritizing the seemingly classifiable, regular and observable over the unruly and open-ended and by continuing to rely on flawed methods to the exclusion of other more suitable techniques.[24]

This is a form of voice-lessness (of which several examples are woven into this piece) that does not appear in speech-language pathology dictionaries and textbooks because its cause cannot be attributed to a malfunction of the speaker's psyche or their vocal folds (as suggested in the first quote listed under note 9). In fact, it appears unrelated to the voice producer as they are commonly understood, namely, as an entity from which that which we call "voice" emerges. Rather, this condition of voice-lessness seems to be imposed by the phonees, those who/which are exposed to vocal productions that have originated from elsewhere. Such phonee-imposed voice-lessness is characterized by the phonees' inability or refusal to acknowledge the presence and relevance of an utterance, by the phonees' lack of capacity or willingness to make sense of vibrations that have reached their senses.

24 For instance, as Zimman (2017) and Azul (2016) demonstrate, when research on gender diverse people's voices is based on the participants' subjective positionings in terms of gender and sexuality it becomes apparent that heteronormative standards will not do justice to the diversity of identities that can be encountered in this imagined community. Instead, research approaches are needed that seek to attend to the complexities of the participants' sociocultural positionings and to their preferences regarding how they wish to be perceived and addressed by others in encounters.

*

I worked in speech-language pathology for ten years without being worried by theoretical, methodological, or ethical concerns. It was only when I decided to approach a research topic that was close to my heart, calling it bashfully "the vocal situation of so-called female-to-male transsexuals" (Scheidt, Kob, & Neuschaefer-Rube, 2003), that I noticed that I could not take it any more.

I am still unable to trace back the exact course of events. Somehow, the very normative practices (such as, naming, gendering, measuring, analysing, observing, diagnosing) that constitute a big part of a speech-language pathologist's bread-and-butter business had turned into fists around this body's heart, throat, and brain and began to affect me. My jacket and facemask that had merged with the rest of this body over the years may have sustained capillary cracks; for in-

stance, as a symptom of old age or through spontaneous disintegration. Rhizomatic pathways to and from those hybrid forces that my protective clothing was meant to ward off may have opened up, transforming my sensitivity.

I thought: While other people seem to have direct access to what they may call "their core" – an imaginary entity located inside their bodies, which holds together the various threads of their subjective positionings, and which has magically created its own language that is both easily speakable and intelligible to all – I am stuck between three types of voice-lessness: motionless silence, copying the patterns of words and modes of presenting oneself to the world I see and hear other people enacting (but in which I cannot recognize myself) and being silenced.

I thought: I as thought will never have a voice.

(How) could I assemble linguistic-material forms and formations in which I could recognize myself (however briefly)?

Whatever I have/want to say and whichever mode of signification I have devised, I will need to engage with questions and enactments of materiality, embodiment, intelligibility, openness and responsiveness in order to give the speech act a chance of coming to sound.

(How) could I imagine/facilitate material-discursive vocal agency?

*

Let me mobilize as a preliminary response to these concerns a retrospective assemblage of memories that are partly engraved in this body's flesh and blood, partly recorded in audible and readable form.[25]

25 See, Azul (2011a, 2011b, 2009) and Scheidt (2008).

I have decided to put these memories to sound again, here and now, reiterated, re-signified, re-materialized. I approach this focussed re-encounter hesitantly because I know that attending to some of the sources on which I could draw might re-quicken and restore to overwhelming power those pathologizing forces I have attempted to put under erasure during the last ten years.

My Goliath are binary classification practices – painting a world of hierarchical oppositions of male versus female, normal versus abnormal, mind versus body, voice versus writing, fact versus fiction, and science versus theory – and biologi-

cally determinist perspectives according to which gender, body, and voice are defined by unambiguously physical forces. My stones are a range of currently debated feminist theories that unhinge the Goliath, my sling is a hybrid mode of text production that draws on memories, theories and imagination.

How to make a strong case for writing, speaking, and performance practices that bring the autobiographical, creative, and critical together and follow shifting theoretical positionings, if approaches to research that do not fit in established epistemological boxes are still relegated to the realm of the inappropriate in many parts of the academic world?

Due to the outright rejection of the "I" (see note 22) there is no point in submitting such work to the speech-language pathology journals I have approached so far. From my experience, even publication outlets whose governing bodies are open to the "I" and supportive of creative practice as research might consider such kinds of trans-speaking submissions as:

a) not performative enough or
b) not creative enough or
c) not goal-directed enough or
d) not providing enough guidance for the reader or
e) not fictional enough or
f) not scholarly enough or
g) not theoretical enough or
h) as not engaging sufficiently with the existing literature with which the piece resonates (for instance, reviewers of this essay in its earlier versions have pointed me to: Bakhtin's work; queer linguistics; speech act theory; feminist and psychoanalytic theories; as examples of literature to which I have not referred explicitly but which would be suited to expand the points I am trying to make).

In addition, most publication outlets only accept printable work and exclude moving creative practices, such as, sound and film.

However, as Smith and Dean argue, there is every reason to be hopeful that the range of the acceptable will continue to be widened, because it is increasingly recognized that academic practice would reap important benefits from this move: "The turn to creative practice is one of the most exciting and revolutionary developments to occur in the university within the last two decades and is currently

accelerating in influence. It is bringing with it dynamic new ways of thinking about research and new methodologies for conducting it, a raised awareness of the different kinds of knowledge that creative practice can convey and an illuminating body of information about the creative process. As higher education become more accepting of creative work and its existing and potential relationships to research, we also see changes in the formation of university departments, in the way conferences are conducted, and in styles of academic writing and modes of evaluation" (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 1).

The rise of "autoethnography" as a qualitative research method (e.g. Adams, Ellis, & Holman Stones, 2015), the emergence of the field of "performative social science" (e.g. special issue in *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 2008, 9(2), http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/issue/view/10), and textbooks such as, Kara (2015) and Lykke (2014), provide further examples of a recent trend towards opening up academic practice for alternative approaches to knowledge production.

*

I have scraped off those layers of skin that were once discernible as my jacket and facemask and decide to challenge one of Goliath's myriad offsprings: the inextricable linkage in German law of given name and sex category and the unwieldy body of rules that restrict the possibilities for German nationals to request changes to these original designations.

In the so-called "general administrative regulation for the law about the change of family names and given names", part two: "change of given names", section three: "choice of new given names" it says: "For people of male sex only male given names are permissible, for people of female sex only female given names" (see for the wording of these regulations in German: http://www.verwaltungsvorschriften-im-internet.de/bsvwvbund_11081980_VII31331317.htm).

Imagine the predicament of people whose bodies cannot be unambiguously classified as male or female via traditional medico-scientific inspection practices (inter* people); or of those, like me, whose bodies were thought to be easily classifiable at birth but who do not identify with the sex that has been registered on their birth certificate. The former have been treated by German law until recently as if they do not exist[26] and the latter continue to be considered special cases for which

a special law has been invented, the "law about the change of given names and the determination of sex membership in special cases", commonly abbreviated to: "transsexuals' law".[27] (From the law's abbreviated name it cannot be decided whether it is meant to be a body of rules to enable or to restrict the movements of those to whom it applies).

26 Recent legislative changes in Germany (effective from November 2013) prescribe that parents of children whose genitals appear ambiguous at birth and are not immediately made unambiguous via medical intervention have to leave the question of the child's gender/sex unanswered in birth registration documents. Inter* activists have pointed out that this rule is tantamount to a coercive outing of these children and bears the risk of increasing rather than reducing discrimination of inter* people (see e.g. Ghattas, 2013, pp. 69–72).

27 See the wording of the transsexuals' law in German: http://www.dgti.org/tsgrecht.html?id=70

According to the transsexuals' law a request for a name change that also involves a change of the name's assigned sex category will only be granted if the applicant can convince a magistrate of the following:

1) that they do not any more identify with the sex that is registered on their birth certificate but with the "other" sex;
2) that they have felt compelled for at least three years to live in accordance with their beliefs; and
3) that there is a high degree of probability that the sense of belonging to the other sex won't change again.

*

What was I to do?

At the time when I first contemplated queering those conservative forces that had restricted my movements during my entire life, my situation (as seen from my subjective perspective) did not comply with the requirements of the transsexuals' law, because:

1) I had never identified with how the people around me defined the bounda-

ries of an acceptable expression of membership of the female or the male sex;

2) I had only just started to get an idea of what my own beliefs were;

3) I had always found it too hard to follow the reasoning of probability theory.

In hindsight I consider it a mixed blessing that I succeeded in convincing the magistrate that he was obliged to apply the privileges that come with the transsexuals' law to me. For, while I thoroughly enjoy being called by a name I have chosen myself, a name, whose meaning implies that whenever I am called or referred to a high degree of fondness for me ("Beloved!") is expressed (at least nominally), the change of gender entry in my birth certificate meant merely that I was granted permission to transition from one misfitting categorization to the other.

What is more, sex reassignment in Germany came at the time at a high cost.[28] It required the applicant to consent to having their reproductive organs cut out of their body as if excising a tumour and to other bits and pieces being scraped together from elsewhere in order to construct an appearance that the surgeon considered the best possible approximation of a normal looking male or female body. After such surgeries, people might experience complications, such as, infections, tearing or necrosis of tissue, problems with urination, traditional forms of sexual intercourse or the capacity to experience sexual pleasure and may require ongoing medical care for the rest of their lives (see e.g. Sutcliffe et al., 2009 and Wierckx et al., 2011).

28 See the ruling by the German Federal Constitutional Court from January 2011, in which the requirement to be made infertile and to have had sex reassignment surgery prior to a legal gender change was declared unconstitutional: http://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2011/bvg11-007.html.

*

Interim report

It has now been fifteen years since I have subjected this body to several steps of the medical approach to female-to-male transsexualism as it was prescribed in Germany at the time.

At first, I was sometimes able to briefly look at this body when I stood naked in front of a mirror.

On some days, when I attached a silicone cock and some facial hair, flexed some muscles, and hardened my gaze, I even managed to trick myself into seeing (for seconds) the appearance of a viable subject/body (and it gave me a KICK[29]).

29 KICK: "A blow or knock with the foot;

a grave or humbling set-back; an expression of severe criticism or disapproval; opposition, objection, repugnance;

a jerk, jolt; jerking motion. Hence, a pulse or surge of electricity capable of producing a jerk in a detecting or measuring instrument;

a strong or sharp stimulant effect … ; a thrill, excitement, pleasure; a feeling of marked enjoyment or the cause of such enjoyment; … to be excited or pleased by, to enjoy; … , purely for pleasure or excitement, freq. recklessly or irresponsibly;

an interest or enthusiasm, esp. one that is temporary; a fashion, fad" (*OED Online*, 2017).

On most days, however, I averted my eyes quickly and got dressed as fast as I could. I knew that my earlier predicament had remained unchanged: This body was not mine. I was not this body.

Listening to the vibrations of air molecules that emerged from this body's mouth echoed the reflections on the mirror image. This voice, amplified via reverberations from the bathroom tiles, the vocal fold muscles thickened from testosterone treatment, the mucosa sluggish from caffeine and alcohol-induced dehydration and irritated from inhaled smoke particles, the air moving slowly and slightly irregular through this exerted throat, was not mine. I was not this voice.

I seemed stuck "between the pains of two violations, the mark of gender and the unlivability of its absence" (Stryker, 2006, p. 253). The CREATURE[30] I saw in the mirror and the gruff I heard in the echo, were not the PERSON[31] I had – for a while – wanted to become.

30 CREATURE: "A created thing or being; a product of creative action; a creation;

a human being; a person, an individual. With modifying word indicating the type of person, and esp. expressing admiration, affection, compassion, or com-

miseration;

a reprehensible or despicable person;

a living or animate being; an animal, often as distinct from a person;

a person who owes his or her fortune and position, and remains subservient to,

a patron; a person who is ready to do another's bidding; a puppet, a cat's paw" (*OED Online*, 2017).

31 PERSON: "A role or character assumed in real life, or in a play, etc.; a part, function, or office; a persona; a semblance or guise;

an individual human being; a man, woman, or child;

a man or woman of high rank, distinction, or importance; a personage;

a human being, as distinguished from an animal, thing, etc. In later use also: an individual regarded as having human rights, dignity, or worth;

in general philosophical sense: a conscious or rational being" (*OED Online*, 2017).

*

While having succeeded in claiming the legal right to be addressed as "Herr" ("Mr") rather than "Frau" ("Ms/Mrs") is regarded by some the maximally possible step a person can take to transform their life, for me, subjecting myself to the violent forces of sex reassignment constituted no more than an initial exploratory operation in my long-term project of investigating the possibilities of coming to voice on my terms, of becoming my take on "David".

Home a-phonia remedy trial: Proposal for a personal explorative inquiry

(taken from: *Ephemeral cookery for the trans-speaking voice clinician*, chapter 1: Taking care of oneself before contemplating taking care of others)

Will this body become my body in the moment when I begin caressing its scars and other deviations from famous (marble) models and feel grateful for and say yes to the imperfections and ambiguities that my treatment was unable to erase?

How to embrace and disarm the "attribution of monstrosity" (Stryker, 2006, p. 245) that seems to emerge from everywhere (mirrors, walls, thoughts, utterances, silences, stares, structural exclusions)?

How to reclaim a "somatechnics of perception" (Sullivan, 2012) that allows me to "speak… in my personal voice … assert my worth … and redefine a life worth living" (Stryker, 2006, p. 256)?

How to transform my staggering between nostalgic alliances with dictionary definitions, the simplicity of scientific epistemologies, the promises of contemporary feminisms and artistic research into an ode to linguistic, disciplinary and representational homelessness?

How to bring up the strength to refuse any alignment other than with the choir of the raffish?

Method.

1: Take off silicone cock
2: Shred
3: Turn into personal lubricant
4: Enjoy!
5: Dispose of categorizations
6: Turn statues into marbles
7: Flood interactional space with utopian sensibilities
8: Keep the balls rolling

*

While this is how I see things, my profession and its predominant discourses continue to build their strongholds. We have to, so they say, conduct large-scale research trials with the gender identity and sex development disordered populations in order to find the most effective methods of voice feminization or masculinization. With the help of early endocrinological intervention, it has already become possible to enable a smooth transition from young people's sexless prepubertal voices to normal adult voices in the reassigned gender. In the foreseeable future, so they might say some time soon, we will be able to 3D print standard-sized male or female voice organs and implant them into suitable pharyngo-laryngectomized throats in a simple organ replacement procedure.

I do not applaud when I bear witness to announcements of this kind. I do not raise my glass to celebrate million dollar grants my colleagues might win from government initiatives, pharmaceutical or biofabrication companies. Instead, I break with the rules of politeness and go back to my office for an intimate encounter with those forces that have always already both violated and enabled me. I put these hands on this body, hum a tune (mmm mmm mmm mmm mmm mmmmm, ¡ay! ¡ay! ¡ay! ¡ay! ¡ay! ¡ayyy!) and convert the vibrations I sense to scribbles on paper which I will make available, some day in the future, for audiences, like the readership of this journal, in order to stage a further joint attempt at diversifying approaches to knowledge production and re-presentation.

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Dismantling the Transgender Brain

Eric Llaveria Caselles

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I analyze in detail a neuroscientific research paper that investigates the structural connectome of transmen and transwomen in relation to cismen and ciswomen. Situated within the frame of Feminist Science Studies and from an outsider-within perspective, my analysis meets three objectives. First, it provides an understanding of the research presented in the paper: what is the research question, which methods are they using, which paradigms do they follow? Second, it problematizes the findings of the research paper and the interpretation thereof by focusing on different conceptualizations of sex/gender within neuroscience; the limits of neuroimaging technologies and the privileging of particular lines of interpretations. Finally, it reflects upon the challenges of this exercise by asking about the role of ignorance and learning in interdisciplinary work; the impact of epistemic hierarchies and the political and ethical dimensions of the research paper. My conclusion is that the lack of engagement of the neuroscientists with perspectives from gender studies and with the voices of trans people constitutes a severe neglect of the social and political responsibility of researchers and reinforces the oppression of the trans community.

KEYWORDS: neuroscience, transgender, hardwiring paradigm, sex/gender binary, research ethics.

AUTHOR NOTE: Eric Llaveria Caselles was born in Valencia, Spain and named Maria after her grandmother. At the age of 17 s/he moved to Berlin and got involved in feminist and queer networks. He is currently finishing his MA Gender Studies at the Humboldt University. Interested in feminist and decolonizing approaches to knowledge production, he works at the intersection of epistemic injustice, social studies of science, history of science and trans studies. As a filmmaker, he has co-directed two shorts and directed a medium length film within a collaborative

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queer postpornographic sci-fi project. The personal impulses of this work have recently been published in the essay "From scientific fictions to postpornographic tales".

As a gender studies student with a background in social sciences and influenced by queer theory, my attitude towards biology and medicine in the past could be described as both ignorant and rejective. Inspired by the autobiography of Julia Serano (2007), a transwoman, feminist activist and biologist, and reflecting back on my experience as a queer trans person, I started questioning this stance and became interested in the production of transsexuality/transgenderism as an epistemic biomedical object (Rheinberger, 1997). One of the fields currently paying attention to transsexuality/transgenderism and reconfiguring it as biomedical object is neuroscience. Fernando Vidal (2009) understands current neuroscientific investigation as part of the history of the cerebral subject, a notion of selfhood developed from the 17th century on within western modernity. The brain becomes the material site of the modern self, with neuroscience becoming a privileged site from which to make socially relevant claims about virtually all issues affecting the individual and society. Given this position of authority and the insufficient approach in Neuroethics that "foreground mainstream interests (or panics) motivated by our attachment to the liberal humanist subject, and thus prioritize concerns for individual rights and the freedom of choice" (Roy, 2012, p. 218), Deboleena Roy calls for feminists in the humanities and social sciences to learn how to engage in neuroscience in a critical but constructive manner and enter a "shared space of perplexity" on the differences of sex, gender and sexuality in the brain (Roy, 2012, p. 220). In this paper[1], I take a step in this direction and analyze in detail an exemplary neuroscientific research paper on transgender brains. Situated within the frame of Feminist Science Studies and from an outsider-within perspective, my analysis has three aims. First, to provide an understanding of the research presented in the paper: what is the research question, which methods are they using, and which paradigms do they follow? Second, I problematize aspects of the research paper by introducing the work of neuroscientists inspired by gender studies and feminist scholarship

as well as researchers from the social sciences and humanities with a focus on neuroscience. I will concentrate on the conceptualization of sex/gender, the limits of neuroimaging technologies and the privileging of certain interpretations above others. Finally, I reflect upon the challenges of this exercise asking about the role of ignorance and learning in interdisciplinary work; the impact of epistemic hierarchies and the political and ethical dimensions of the research paper.

I choose the paper because it met the criteria of being a recent publication dealing with transsexuality/transgenderism within the field of neuroscience. Being alien to the field I didn't have the knowledge to identify a key paper or tell which one was especially relevant, so I chose a generic paper that matched my specifications. I conceptualized the paper as exemplary of an established research paradigm I aim to reconstruct. The paper I will be analyzing is titled *Structural Connectivity Networks of Transgender People* and was published by the journal *Cerebral Cortex* in 2014 (Hahn et al.). The main research site for the study was the Functional, Molecular and Translational Neuroimaging Laboratory of the Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy at the Medical University of Vienna, an institution focusing on the application and development of neuroimaging techniques (Lanzenberger, 2008). The study looks at transgenderism as a form of psychiatric disorder through which it is possible to gain new insights into the functioning of sex differences in the human brain: "Our understanding of sex differences in the human brain is reflected in gender differences and endocrine influences in the prevalence and treatment of various psychiatric disorders. In this context, it is particularly interesting to study gender identity disorder" (Hahn et al., 2014, p. 3527). In doing so, the study fills a research gap in the assessment of brains of trans people in relation to cis people: "although previous investigations of transsexual people have focused on regional brain alterations, evaluations on an network level, especially those structural in nature, are largely missing" (Hahn et al., 2014, p. 3527). As will be explained later in more detail, the structural connectivity describes the brain as a network of neurons and brain regions connected to each other. "Structural" means that the connectivity measured is not related to any specific cognitive task. If this were the case, the researchers would be looking into functional connectivity. The researchers recruited "23 female-to-male (FtM) and 21 male-to-female (MtF) transgender patients before hormone therapy as compared with 25 female and 25 male controls" (Hahn et al., 2014, p. 3527), with the goal of comparing the structural con-

nectomes of every group in relation to the three other groups. While on a global level the measurements between the groups didn't differ, the researchers found differences at the regional and local level. In my analysis I show that there can be no straightforward interpretation of these findings and raise a number of severe theoretical and methodological problems.

Situating Trans in the sexed brain

Throughout the article, it is remarkable that the authors use the terms "transsexual" and "transgender" interchangeably avoiding any reference to the unstable but meaningful delimitations between them. Susan Stryker defines her use of transgender

> as an umbrella term for a wide variety of bodily effects that disrupt or denaturalize heteronormatively constructed linkages between an individual's anatomy at birth, a nonconsensually assigned gender category, psychical identifications with sexed body images and/or gendered subject positions, and the performance of specifically gendered social, sexual, or kinship functions. (Stryker, 1998, p. 150)

In the introduction to the volume *Transfeminist Perspectives in and beyond Transgender and Gender Studies*, A. Finn Enke also defines "transgender" as an umbrella term for a multiplicity of identities, including "transsexual". Going further, they invoke the dimension of the term as a political and social movement against gender norms and hierarchies, fighting for the right of gender self-determination and civil and social rights for everyone (Enke, 2012a, p. 4; 2012b). Although the use of transgender as a global term is far from unproblematic (Jarrin, 2016), I understand the interchangeable use of "transgender" and "transsexual" to describe participants diagnosed with a "Gender Identity Disorder", as an erasure of trans people's ongoing struggle to reclaim their identities and experiences beyond pathologization of gender variance by psychiatric institutions.

The first line of the Hahn et al. paper reads: "The investigation of differences between men and women has been of great interest to the neuroscience community, as structural and functional aspects of the human brain show marked sex

differences" (2014, p. 3527). The authors present a long list of studies as evidence of this claim, stating a strictly binary understanding of sex. From the sex differences illustrated, the authors emphasize differences in the prevalence and treatment of psychiatric disorders. They continue: "In this context, it is particularly interesting to study gender identity disorder" (Hahn et al., 2014, p. 3527). The authors define gender identity disorder as follows:

> This disorder is characterized by the strong desire to belong to the gender opposite from their biological sex, which is often accompanied by emotional and social burden. Subsequently, patients often seek hormonal treatment and sex reassignment surgery in order to allow for more congruence between gender identity and appearance. This divergence between gender identity and biological sex has been proposed to emerge from the temporal difference between sexual differentiation of the genitals and the brain. (Hahn et al. 2014, p. 3527)

From this definition it is possible to gain further insights into the concept of sex/gender as used by the authors. They understand sex as a binary category of male and female, defined through a relation of opposition, as an "either/or". They make a distinction between sex and gender and localize biological sex in the genitals and gender identity in the brain. The authors make explicit that their investigation of trans people's brains is subordinated to the paradigm of the male/female sex and gender binary, which might explain their deliberate ignorance of the meaning of the term transgender. Their definition of sex and gender is categorical and normative, becoming apparent in the use of the terms "opposition" (instead of thinking in gradual differences and overlap) and "congruence" (as opposed to mismatch, inappropriateness, incorrectness) to define "gender identity disorder" in relation to an unspoken sex-gender-order.

Swaab and Bao's Model of Sex, Gender and Transsexuality

To gain further insights into the framing of sex and gender in the study, I want to take a closer look at the model of sex and gender formulated by Dick Swaab and Ai-Min Bao (2011, 2013), which is the one followed by the studies' authors.

Swaab and Bao claim that sex and gender identity are defined during the intrauterine development and early neonatal phase. From the perspective of individual development, genes and hormones stand as the defining units that will determine sex, gender identity, sexual orientation. These units will shape further behavioural traits of the person such as toy preference and drawing patterns in kids. Moreover, they will also shape traits such as aggressivity, prevalence of conditions like depression, anxiety, schizophrenia drug abuse or Alzheimer's disease. Swaab and Bao present a two-step model of sex and gender identity in which sex stands for genital differentiation and gender for brain differentiation. In the first step, between the 6th and 12th week of pregnancy, the fetal gonads will develop as male if there are androgen receptors or female if there are none. After the differentiation of sexual organs, the sexual differentiation of the brain occurs. The brain anatomy and circuitry will be organized during pregnancy and in the first three months after birth as either male or female mainly through the effects of sex hormones, in which again testosterone holds the key role. Apart from sex hormones, they acknowledge the influence of genes and epigenetic changes depending on context variables such as exposure to chemicals, far-reaching experiences (child abuse) or mild events (contextual fear learning in rats) in the sexual differentiation of the brain anatomy. However, these context variables are not included in their interpretation of findings. In puberty, the brain circuits will be activated by sex hormones. In this account, the anatomical and physiological organization of the brain decides on gender identity and sexual orientation:

> Structural differences in the brain resulting from the interaction of genes, sex hormones, and developing brain cells are thought to be the basis of, e.g. sex differences in gender role (behaving as a man or a woman in society), gender identity (the conviction that one belongs to the male or female gender) and sexual orientation (heterosexuality, homosexuality or bisexuality). (Bao & Swaab, 2011, p. 215)

In terms of evidence, this theory claims to link measurable anatomical or physiological signs (sexual organs, brain anatomy, hormone levels) to other more or less measurable variables like behaviour and cognitive skills (object preference, toy preference, drawing) (Bao & Swaab, 2011, p. 214), self-definition as male or

female and sexual orientation. They don't take into account gender identities outside of the gender binary and their options for sexual orientation are heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality and in some occasions even pedophilia (Swaab & Bao, 2013, p. 2977). But the theory has difficulties explaining how the connection between a certain anatomical fact and a specific behavioural or psychological derivative of it works or why it corresponds. This gap is settled in a sentence in which they refer back to evolutionary theory. After referring to a controversial sexed toy preference experiment with primates done by Alexander & Hines (2002) and ignoring crucial critical responses which problematise the validity of their claims (for example Jordan-Young, 2010; Ah-King, 2014), Bao and Swaab state: "It is thus logical to propose that the sex differences in playing behaviour originated in evolution before the hominids, and are imprinted under the influence of testosterone during our intrauterine development" (Bao & Swaab, 2011, p. 214).

In the outline of this theory of sex and gender identity, Swaab and Bao do not derive their evidence from a discussion of the constitutive elements upon which it rests: genetic determination of sex, neuroendocrinology, brain physiology and behavioural and cognitive aspects of gender. Instead, they look into "disorders" to provide empirical evidence of his model. They define transsexuality as "the most extreme gender-disorder" consisting "of the unshakeable conviction of belonging to the opposite gender" (Bao & Swaab, 2011, p. 216; Swaab & Bao, 2013, p. 2983); or "people with male sexual organs who feel a female identity, or vice versa" (Swaab & Bao, 2013, p. 2979). This definition rests on the closed, binary, oppositional and normative notion of sex as male-female that appears in the Hahn et al. paper. It simplifies and bends rhetorically the experiences of trans people, ignoring the diversity of identifications and self-definitions, suggesting the fixity and stability of a trait – a "unshakeable conviction" or "feeling" – and thus being able to define it as an inborn, essentialized quality. Following this model of sex and gender determination during pregnancy, Bao and Swaab explain the mechanism by which transsexuality arises as follows:

> The theory of the origins of transsexuality is based on the fact that the differentiation of sexual organs appears before the sexual differentiation of the brain. As the two processes are not synchronous, it could be that they take different routes under the influence of differently timed factors. If this is the case, one

> might expect to find, in transsexuals, female sexual organs with a male brain, vice versa. (Swaab & Bao, 2013, p. 2985)

What can be observed here is a biologization and essentialization of gender identity and behaviour through the recourse to evolutionary theory and transsexuality as gender identity disorder. By bringing in the evolutionary moment, male and female gendered behaviour is essentialized and situated outside of the realm of socialization. The biologization of gender identity occurs when the cross-gender identification of the transsexual person is explained solely in terms of genetic and hormonal factors. The male identity of the transmen is supposedly located in the brain (before hormone replacement therapy) and explained by the exposure of the fetus to "abnormal" hormones. The same should be the case for transwomen. This is where Hahn et al.'s study is situated. In the definition of the objectives of the study provided by the Austrian Science Fund [ASF] they state as their aim "to investigate differences between transsexuals and healthy control subjects in brain function and functional connectivity, brain morphology and structural connectivity" (ASF, n.d.). By providing evidence that the transmale brain resembles the cismale brain in a similar way that the transfemale brain resembles the female brain, the researchers would strengthen one essential hypothesis of the theory of Bao and Swaab: that gender identity and gendered behaviour as male or female are inborn and determined by sex differences in the brain. However, in Bao and Swaab's theory, the concepts of gender identity and behaviour are constructed as mimicking the properties of the concept of sex as unequivocally male or female, stable and consistent across all dimensions of behaviour and identity. This problem is addressed in the critiques and alternative paradigms that I will introduce in the following sections.

The Hardwiring Paradigm

The Hahn et al. study and the Swaab and Bao model are examples of what Rebecca Jordan-Young (Jordan-Young 2010; Jordan-Young & Rumiati, 2012) has labeled the hardwiring paradigm of sex and gender in neuroscientific research:

> At present, neuroscientific research on sex/gender in humans has stalled on sterile approaches encouraged by the dominant brain organization paradigm,

> which holds that steroid hormones at a critical period of fetal development give rise to permanent structural and functional sex/gender differences in the brain and behavior. The paradigm known colloquially as "hardwiring", has moved beyond the level of theory to be treated as a simple fact of human development. (Jordan-Young & Rumiati, 2012, p. 306f)

Rebecca Jordan-Young and Raffaella I. Rumiati explain conceptual flaws, empirical shortcomings and ethical issues of this model. Here I will refer only to the conceptual flaws as explained by Jordan-Young and Rumiati, since these are the ones that can be observed in the Hahn et al. study and because they amplify the objections I raised at the end of the previous section. The first falsity is the assumption that the brain is sexually dimorphic in the same way that genitals are. Evidence on structural differences in the brain between "males" and "females" are highly contested and the functional implications of anatomical divergences are even more obscure. Unlike genitals, the differences between brains in male and female defined populations are statistical outcomes at a group level they cannot be identified at an individual level. Taking the brain's plasticity into consideration, these differences could as well be the result of gendered social roles and experiences. This critique becomes even more crucial by questioning the notion of sexually dimorphic genitals (for example Fausto-Sterling, 2012). The second conceptual flaw is the omission of evidence contradicting the assumption of inborn gendered behaviour. As experiments with rats have shown, the "organizing" impact of hormones during pregnancy and in the first three months after birth are modifiable by experience and environment. For humans there are three forms of evidence which question the definition of gendered behaviour as an inborn, stable and unmodifiable trait. First, the variability within male and female groups in relation to cognitive abilities, occupational interests, educational interests and attainment and sexual orientation. Second, the variation across time and in different societies regarding which traits are seen as masculine and which as feminine. And finally, there is evidence of the modifiability of supposedly permanent traits following specific training. This type of evidence is the reason why a concept of gender identity constructed as mimicking the concept of sex bears little explanatory potential. The third conceptual problem raised by Jordan-Young and Rumiati is the fact that the only way to prove the "hardwiring" paradigm would be to expose human fetuses to monitored

hormone levels. Since this is impracticable, the only way to look for empirical support are quasi-experimental designs that look for correlation between gendered behavioral traits and indications of early steroid hormone exposure. This is exactly what the Hahn et al. study does by looking at the correlation between transsexuality (defined as reversed gender identity) and the brain structure (defined as the reflection of early hormone exposure).

Neuroscience beyond the binary

The objections of Jordan-Young and Rumiati are a clear sign that neuroscientific research is not an homogeneous field and points towards alternative research paradigms being developed on the topics of sex and gender. Especially relevant in this regard is the NeuroGenderings network, "a transdisciplinary and international group of researchers from the neurosciences, the humanities and science studies working on and in the neuroscience of gender" (Dussauge & Kaiser 2012, p. 211). The network grew out of a first workshop held in Uppsala in 2010 with the title "NeuroGenderings: Critical Studies of the Sexed Brain" and has been active since. In the texts of researchers associated to the network, the composite term "sex/gender" is often used. This was introduced by Anelis Kaiser as a reaction to the lack of clear terminological definitions of sex and gender in neuroscientific research and a reflection of the impossibility to categorize neither sex nor gender as completely biological or completely social (2012). The composite sex/gender holds on to the important conceptual differences of "sex" and "gender", but does not try to define where one ends and the other begins. This understanding is influenced by the deconstruction of sex as in the work of Judith Butler and stands in the tradition of Donna Haraway and Fausto-Sterling, among other Feminist Science Studies' scholars, to question the claims of neutrality and objectivity of the natural sciences and reflect how biological facts are also socially constructed (Kaiser, 2012; Dussauge & Kaiser, 2012). One of the main challenges facing the scholars involved in the NeuroGenderings network is to translate this epistemological stance into empirical research.

In *Recommendations for sex/gender neuroimaging research*, Gina Rippon, Rebecca Jordan-Young, Anelis Kaiser and Cordelia Fine, all members of the NeuroGenderings Network, list four key principles that should guide brain research-

ers looking into sex and gender. *Overlap*, meaning that sex/gender differences in behavior and cognitive skills are less pronounced than most often assumed and likely to be overlapping. The overlap in behavior does not imply overlap in brain structure, since the same outcome can be reached by different neural means. This principle implies that brain dimorphism as analogous to the model of genital sex dimorphism is not an adequate model of representing the differences between men and women. *Mosaicism*, meaning that sex/gender in behavior, brain structure and functioning can't be modeled as two closed categories male/female. Gender is understood to be multi-factorial and one individual brain does not correspond to the male or female form as statistically defined, but will incorporate parts of both. The principle of *contingency* stands for a complex conceptualization of gender that takes into consideration the interaction of structural, social, individual and biological factors. Further, it demands attention to the fact that time, place, social or ethnic group, economic class, social situation etc. are factors shaping sex/gender. The principle of *entanglement* draws attention to the fact that neural differences between male and female can be modified, neutralized or even reversed as the effect of specific context, experiences or training. Acknowledging these principles demands different strategies for research design, data analysis and interpretation than the ones found in the Hahn et al. study. For example, the authors encourage the use of bigger samples for appropriate statistical significance of the results. Multi-dimensional, trait-based operationalization of sex/gender should be established instead of male/female according to gonadal sex. They are very critical of the already-mentioned "snapshot" comparisons between male/female since they automatically reproduce essentialist and fixed notions, even in contradiction to the theoretical rejection thereof (Rippon, Jordan-Young, Kaiser & Fine, 2014).

A practical example of how neuroscience can work towards problematizing assumptions regarding the sex/gender binary is the study by Joel et al. *Sex beyond the genitalia: The human brain mosaic*, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, definitely not the usual suspect of radical queer-feminism. The researchers analyze MRIs of more than 1400 human brains to find out whether there is such a thing as a male brain and a female brain. They find an:

> extensive overlap between the distributions of females and males for all gray matter, white matter, and connections assessed" and state that "although there

> are sex/gender differences in the brain, human brains do not belong to one of two distinct categories: male brain/female brain. (Joel et al., 2015, p. 15468)

Further, I want to refer to one more aspect ingrained in brain research on sex/gender as voiced by Emily Ngubia Kuria:

> the problem of naturalization on gender/sex difference research stems from the fact that difference is boxed up in the concept of reproduction and reproductive capacity. […] Difference is discussed along the terms of procreation and the mainstream asserts that biological facilities have evolved to make the organisms better suited for procreation and survival of the species. (2012, p. 274)

As shown earlier on, this is the case in Swaab and Bao's model of sex and gender, in which they settle the question in a brief reference to a study of toy preference in vervet monkeys without taking into consideration all the difficulties that arise from this claim. As Kuria states, the link to mainstream evolutionary theory legitimizes "the heteronormative binary gender system that taboos bodies and sex practices that do not reproduce" (2012, p. 274). At this it is worth pointing to the work of Joan Roughgarden on a new model for evolutionary theory that includes the principle of social selection instead of sexual selection and is thus able to account for the evidence of sexual diversity found in nature (2010).

The Human Connectome

At the core of Connectomics lies a theoretical modeling of the human brain as a network of "billions of neurons connected by trillions of synapses and wiring that spans a distance halfway to the moon" (Sporns, 2012, p. 1) and it aims for the mapping of brain networks. The field of Connectomics was initiated by Olaf Sporns and Rolf Kötter around 2005; it entered NIH sponsorship in 2009 and has since become a major endeavor in the form of The Human Connectome Project (Sporns, 2012; Human Connectome Project, 2015). In graph theory, a graph is defined as "a mathematical representation of a real-world network or, more generally, of some system composed of interconnected elements" (Sporns, 2011, p. 7) and is built of nodes and edges. Applied to brain research, nodes stand for neurons or

brain regions and the edges can represent different measures of association. The brain connectome is not an object found in our bodies, it is a highly constructed and crafted epistemic object that is related to a physiological material object (the brain), a theoretical model (graph theory), a set of technologies (neuroimaging machines, computers, software applications, etc.) and a complex infrastructure of research institutions, data sharing, etc. Although Connectomics seems to describe the brain, it much rather creates a new object that is related to the former but still needs to be seen as a distinct entity.

Crafting Connectomes

The Hahn et al. study looks for the structural connectivity of the brain, which Sporns defines as follows:

> Structural connectivity refers to a set of physical or structural (anatomical) connections linking neural elements. These anatomical connections range in scale from those of local circuits of single cells to large-scale networks of interregional pathways. Their physical pattern may be thought of as relatively static at shorter time scales (seconds to minutes) but may be plastic or dynamic at longer times scales (hours to days) […]. (Sporns, 2011, p. 36)

The researchers used diffusion-weighted and T1-weighted magnetic resonance images (MRI) to develop individual structural connectivity matrices. The differences in diffusivity in brain tissue allow inferences on the direction of fiber bundles of axons, since diffusion is more hindered across than along axon bundles. Because there is not enough spatial resolution in MRI scans to measure single brain cells, the brain has to be divided into regions before its data can be represented in the form of a network or graph. The parcellation of the brain in regions is a crucial step that will shape the outcome of the graph analysis. In the Hahn et al. study, the researchers defined 89 gray matter regions of interest (ROIs) based on three different studies. The topic of the first study is the effects of age and sex on the anatomical connectivity pattern (Gong et al., 2009). The second study looks at the effects of Alzheimer's disease in brain connectivity (Bozzali et al., 2011). The third study investigates brain abnormalities in Spina Bifida Meningomyelocele, a congenital

birth defect affecting the nervous system (William et al., 2013). Besides the striking difference in research topics, the methods used and number of regions of interest defined in the three studies varies from each other. Hahn et al. (2014) provide no further explanation as to their choice of ROI, which to me raises questions about the adequacy of ROIs and consequently about the significance of the findings.

The paired associations between the 89 ROIs are worked out via the application of probabilistic tractography to the diffusion-weighted MRI scans. From here, fiber pathways representing the structural connectivity are reconstructed (Sporns, 2011; Bullmore & Sporns, 2009; Human Connectome Project, n.d.). According to the information provided by the Human Connectome Project, tractography measures are indirect, difficult to interpret quantitatively and error-prone. Due to their diameter (measuring 1µm), researchers can't trace individual axons and instead must study bundles of potentially tens of thousands of axons (to a scale of approx. 1–2 mm) in which axons might be going in different directions. Probabilistic tractography offers an estimate of the most likely fiber orientation (Human Connectome Project, n.d.). This raises questions regarding the significance and meaning of the measurements in relation to the actual structure and functioning of the brain.

One of the usual ways to represent the structural connectivity of a brain is the connectivity matrix. Graph analysis is then applied to the connectivity matrices for an assessment and characterization of different networks in properties represented by numerical values. It is important to note that the meanings attributed to the values result from comparing sets of networks and can´t be drawn directly from the numerical values obtained. This process of deriving meanings from the values is made more complex as comparisons between networks are not always applicable: "Networks constructed using different parcellation schemes may significantly differ in their properties and cannot, in general, be quantitatively compared. Specifically, structural and functional networks may only be meaningfully compared if these networks share the same parcellation schemes" (Rubinov & Sporns, 2010, p. 1060). Brain networks can be characterized at different levels.

In the Hahn et al. study, they use measurements at global, hemispheric, lobar and regional/local levels. The values of the each group are compared to the other groups. Guided by Bao and Swaab's version of the hardwiring paradigm, the authors look for the following results. Firstly, differences in the structural connectivity values between the four groups. Secondly, evidence of stronger similarity

of the MtF group connectivity values to the values of the cisfemale control group compared to the values of the cismale control group and respectively, a stronger similarity of the values from the FtM group to the cismale control group compared to the cisfemale control group. Thirdly, specific patterns of structural connectivity unique and specific to both the MtF and FtM groups that would stand as neural markers of transsexuality.

No relevant differences were found in the global measurements between groups. In the hemispheric measurements it was found that transwomen had lower HCR[2] value in the subcortical/limbic lobe of the left hemisphere, while both transwomen and transmen had lower HCR values of the subcortical/limbic lobe of the right hemisphere than ciswomen and cismen. More differences were found in local efficiency[3] values in several brain areas between the four groups. However, before being able to extract meaning from these findings, it is necessary to pay attention to several crucial challenges in the fields of Connectomics.

The limits of structural connectivity studies

Reviewing the literature on the human connectome, a number of limitations in the interpretation of data need to be delineated; firstly, that brain connectivity involves computations ranging from elementary computations carried out in subcellular compartments to single neurons cooperating in neural collectives. Thus, no single scale or process can be seen as more relevant than others or can be incorporated in other scales. Within the frame of Connectomics, it is impossible to understand cognition and behavior without taking into account the multiscale architecture of brain connectivity. From this perspective, the study offers a very limited analysis of the brain connectivity (Sporns, 2012).

Secondly, one must take into account individual variability of the brain: "statistical patterns may be preserved, but connectivity measured at the level of single neurons is highly variable across individuals both in terms of the number of elements and their connection topology. Even at the large scale, human brains exhibit significant individual variability for virtually all measurable features of brain structure" (Sporns, 2012, p. 44). Interestingly, this variability does not lead to different functioning of brains in some sort of "functional homeostasis" that allows "many different combinations of structural parameters to support nearly identical

dynamic behaviour" (Sporns, 2012, p. 44). Taking into account the individual variability of the brain structure, what do the statistically calculated values of the four population groups stand for? Whose connectivity is being described? The authors include a visual representation of the average structural connectivity for each one of the research groups. In these images, the nodes and edges of each group are marked on four identical brain layouts: four gender identities become four types of brains. These highly constructed "virtual brains" subsume and supplant the individual "wet brains" (Beaulieu, 2014) of the participants, creating the impression of gender identity being an observable trait of the human brain.

Thirdly, researchers should also take into consideration the ongoing structural remodeling and plasticity of structural connectivity patterns. This happens both at subcellular scale through the continuous replacement of the constituent molecules of cells and tissues, and at a larger scale of cells and synapses through synaptic modifications, neuronal growth and structural plasticity. Further, differences in connectivity patterns have been identified related to different states of mind (Sporns, 2012, pp. 50–55). How telling can a single snapshot of a brain be? How would the values have differed in the Hahn et al. study if the measurements would have been taken at some other point? Following Schmitz and Höppner, "brain images are snapshots of a certain moment of physical materiality, which is always connected to individual biographies. Results of brain scans can thus not provide information on the processes that led to these developments, neither from nature nor from culture" (2014, p. 5; see also Schmitz, 2010).

Perhaps the biggest challenge is the interpretation of structural connectivity in relation to the functioning of the brain and human behavior and cognition. This is a question pervading all of biological research in terms of defining the relation of structure and function: how much can be known about how a system works by knowing how it is built? As Sporn writes: "The importance of structure does not imply that structure alone can fully predict all functional outcomes or that full knowledge of structure allows a keen observer to deduce all of the physiology and behavior of a biological system" (Sporns, 2012, p. 4).

Privileging interpretations

In the discussion of their results, Hahn et al. make no mention of the above lim-

itations to their study, instead they simply proclaim that "here, we investigated the structural connectome of female-to-male and male-to-female transsexuals before hormonal treatment using graph theory", and make the values of "male and female healthy subjects" stand in for the references to the male and female brain (Hahn et al., 2014, p. 3530). The data obtained is put to work towards certain claims through rhetorical and interpretative labour. For example, the connectivity measurements obtained do not fit neatly to the expectations of the researchers. There are no differences in the global network metrics between the four groups. Instead of interpreting this in terms of similarity or as a hint towards a reduced significance of sex brain differentiation, the authors emphasize the "widespread differences" in hemispheric, lobar and regional levels, ignoring the overlap and similarities that were also registered at these levels (Hahn et al., 2014, p. 3530). The measurements of MtF and FtM differ from both male and female controls in ways that do not mirror each other. The authors, however, insist on an interpretation that reinforces the separation of trans-brains from cis-brains on the one side and trans-male from trans-female brains on the other: "the observed differences may indicate that the strong desire to exhibit the opposite sex coupled with the psychological stress is accompanied by pronounced but distinct structural signatures for FtM and MtF, respectively" (Hahn et al., 2014, p. 3531). In fact,the way in which MtF and FtM values differ from their respective control values, could as well be interpreted as grounds to question the adequacy of the conceptualization of trans as gender identity reversal within a framework of binary and opposite sex and gender. Instead, the authors opt for "the influence of the different hormones in males and females during puberty" as a possible explanation of the "opposite changes in structural connectivity between FtM and MtF observed here" (Hahn et al., 2014, p. 3531). But when is a structural signature *pronounced* or not? What are *widespread* differences? Also, the changes in structural connectivity between FtM and MtF should not be described as "opposite" because they don't have a direct negative correspondence to each other. The authors continue the discussion of the results by addressing the hypothesis that brains of MtF subjects will show structural similarities to the "female" brain and vice-versa for FtM subjects. Interestingly they don't refer to their own results but merely to other studies: "previous results and interpretations of regional differences suggest a transition from the biological sex to the actual gender identity", labeling this as "feminization" or "masculinization"

(Hahn et al., 2014, p. 3531). Contrary to their the cautious tone of uncertainty thus far, at the end of the discussion the authors conclude:

> The notion that gender identity is an innate characteristic, which emerges from a particular brain structure (Cantor 2011), is further substantiated by the current study, where most structural network metrics represented unique differences as compared with healthy controls. Taken together, these observations suggest that most local physiological aspects indeed undergo a biological transition to the gender identity, whereas characteristics on a network level may reflect the physiological stress accompanied by the psychiatric disorder. (Hahn et al., 2014, p. 3532)

I find this conclusion misleading for a number of reasons. First, the concept of gender identity used by Hahn et al. mimics the properties of the dominant concept of sex (binary, fixed, mutually exclusive) and does not reflect the complexities and dimensions of gender that other neuroscientific models do include. Anelis Kaiser, for example, suggest a model that takes into account (Recalled) Sex/Gender Socialization, Sex/Gender Identity, Sex/Gender Role Orientation, Sex/Gender Role Behavior, Sex/Gender Expression, Political Attitude Towards Sex/Gender Issues, and Culturally Embedded Biological Markers (Kaiser, 2014, pp. 50–52). Second, taking brain plasticity into consideration, the empirical observation of differences in brain structure do not allow one to conclude that this is an inborn characteristic. Third, there are severe theoretical and methodological limitations to the meaning of structural connectivity data, especially when constructing group typologies such as male, female, transmale or transfemale connectivity based on averages of different individual brains. And fourth, the findings are interpreted in a speculative manner in order to make them fit into the theoretical framework provided, and thus relativize and ignore the ways in which the findings don't match the expectations, such as the overwhelming similarities of structural connectivity between the groups and the lack of expected correspondence between trans-male and trans-female brains.

Reflection

This exercise started partially from a place of ignorance – Robert Proctor defines

ignorance as "a kind of *vacuum* or hollow space into which knowledge is pulled"; an "*infantile* absence", but also "a *resource*" and "a *prompt* for knowledge, insofar as we are constantly striving to destroy it – fact by fact" (2008, p. 5). When I first read the Hahn et al. paper, I understood almost nothing and first had to achieve a basic understanding of the theoretical concepts, experimental rules and technological debates underpinning the work. Learning meant to stay in a movement away from the initial question and then again towards it. Within my practical constraints (time, access to material) I privileged a spatial type of knowledge that allowed me to map the relationships between different elements involved in the study. Any attempts to engage cross-disciplinarily must acknowledge/make transparent the (initial) degree of ignorance the author/researcher has towards the disciplines outwith their usual field of research. However, the will to learn and enter a new field of research alien to one's own has to be seen in relation to the perceived relevance and existing hierarchies of the knowledges being produced. If I want to comment on neurological research on sex and gender, I have to grasp a certain amount of knowledge produced in this field not only to understand but also to be acknowledged and heard. On the contrary, neuroscientists who look into matters of sex and gender are not expected to learn from or do the same groundwork in gender studies, and as such their ignorance on these matters won't invalidate their claims within most of the scientific community.

A second aspect of ignorance arises from the political implications of the selective nature of the production of knowledge:

> Part of the idea is that inquiry is always selective. We look *here* rather that *there* […], and the decision to focus on *this* is therefore invariably a choice to ignore *that*. Ignorance is a product of inattention, and since we cannot study all things, some by necessity – almost all, in fact – must be left out. (Proctor, 2008, p. 7)

This applies as much for my analysis as for the Hahn et al. study, but the inevitability of selectivity does not exempt researchers from social and political responsibility and accountability.

The choice of transgender people as the study population, embeds the study within a new context of interactions between scientific research, clinical and medical settings and social and political struggles. The sample comprised 23 female-

to-male […] and 21 male-to-female transgender outpatients. For comparison, 25 healthy female […] and 25 male controls […] were included in the study. In transgender patients, diagnosis of gender identity disorder was assessed by the Structured Clinical Interview for the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition (DSM-IV) by an experienced psychiatrist at the screening visit (Hahn et al., 2014, p. 3528).

According to information on the clinical trials (Lanzenberger, 2015) available online, the "study population" was recruited at the Unit for Gender Identity Disorder (MedUni Wien, 2015) at the General Hospital in Vienna, under the direction of Dr. Ulrike Kaufmann, co-author of the Hahn et al. paper, at the Clinical Department for Gynecological Endocrinology and Reproductive Medicine. The unit was created in 1999 and has established itself as the only center for trans people in Austria, currently providing for 400 trans persons (Mayerhofer, 2015). The conformity with the DSM and the ICD definitions of transsexuality and the complicity with the institutions and mechanisms of state-sanctioned violation of trans people's rights in Austria are heavily charged socio-political acts. Therefore the Hahn et al. study has to be held accountable for the ways in which it contributes to transgender discrimination and benefits from this political situation. According to TGEU[4]'s Position paper, "the 'mental disorder' label reinforces psycho-pathologization driving stigma, making prejudice and discrimination more likely, and rendering trans people more vulnerable to social and legal marginalisation and exclusion. The current mental health diagnosis thus contributes to increased risks for the individual´s mental and physical well-being" (TGEU, 2013, p. 2). In some countries, like in Austria, a diagnosis is needed in order for trans people to access healthcare and legal recognition, while in other countries, the diagnosis will lead to an exclusion of the person from the healthcare system or legal recognition or even promote "reparative therapies". The way the researchers conceptualized and conducted the Hahn et al. study stands in opposition to and disregards many principles voiced from the trans community, like the understanding of gender variance as a common human feature, full access to healthcare for trans people, respect and recognition for trans diversity, respect for trans people´s decisional autonomy, fighting stigmatization of trans people (GATE, 2011).

As Deboleena Roy states, it is crucial for neuroscientific research to reconsider their interest and motivation in locating difference (2012). The study of Hahn et al.

had the explicit goal "to investigate *differences* between transsexuals and healthy control subjects in brain function and functional connectivity, brain morphology and structural connectivity" (ASF, n.d., my emphasis). The researchers need to be held accountable to the questions raised by Roy in order to evaluate their work from a neuroethical perspective:

> (i) is difference being measured in the study for the purpose of understanding difference in and of itself, or is it being measured for the purpose of division?; (ii) does the study demonstrate an appreciation for biological complexity, or in other words, is there enough difference?; (iii) does the study assume that structural differences can be conveniently translated into functional differences? (Roy, 2012, p. 220)

I argue that the Hahn et al. study was not carried out with the purpose of understanding whatever differences might be found between transwomen, transmen, ciswomen and cismen in terms of brain structure. The experimental setup is designed to locate differences that are assumed beforehand to exist and to construct these differences as categorical. As I have shown, the study is based on a simplistic and questionable account of sex and gender; it does not demonstrate a critical assessment of its own methodology, and extrapolates the structural findings to functional and behavioral differences along the lines of an assumed model of masculine and feminine brain, identity and behavior. Therefore, the search for difference as is pursued in the Hahn et al. study is very questionable from a neuroethical point of view.

The fact that researchers in the Hahn et al. paper could write from an authority or expert position about transgender people in ways that completely ignored voices from the trans community made me feel a mixture of anger, sadness and frustration as I engaged with their study. Although I generally encourage research on trans-related issues, in order for the research to be ethically acceptable it *must* go hand in hand with a concern for the health and well-being of trans people, especially in light of the violence and discrimination trans communities face. What I instead encountered was an obstinacy to frame trans identities as pathological and, operating within the binary of male and female, to use the brains and bodies of trans people to reinforce static and oppressive notions of sex and gender.

I wonder, too, how much easier it might be to get access to funding for this kind of seemingly apolitical and neutral research rather than research committed to the care of trans people? This is not about science being on the "right" side of the political debate, it is about practices of silencing and ignoring the voices of and knowledge produced by oppressed positionalities as forms of epistemic injustice. As I keep reading and trying to understand the paper comparing "healthy controls" with "transsexuals", I need to detach myself from my own body and experience and mimic the position of neutrality that the researchers themselves assume. Writing this response is my way of resistance by creating a space in which my embodiment can exist and articulate itself.

Endnotes

1 This paper is based on an exercise from the course *Biological Knowledge and Gender-Knowledge – an (im)possible Dialogue?*, taught by Dr. Kerstin Palm at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

2 A value indicating whether a lobe is more strongly connected to the own hemisphere or the other.

3 Local efficiency is a value that describes how efficient the exchange of information is within a network.

4 Transgender Europe (TGEU) is a trans-led organisation that advocates for trans people's human rights and raises awareness on the multiple forms of discrimination faced by members of the trans community.

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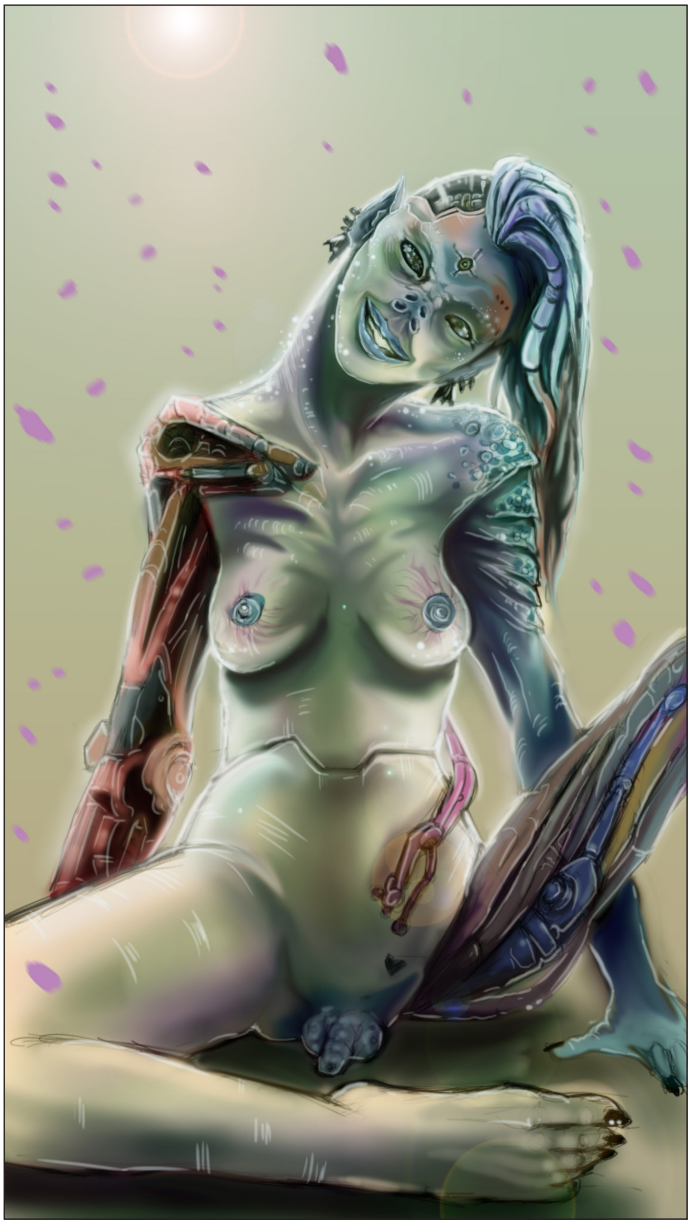
Synthetic Organism

Joyce Gloria Floyd

My name is Joyce Gloria Floyd and I am a transgender woman born and partly raised in Guatemala. Since I can remember I always was seen as somebody who is “different”.



I grew up playing in nature, where I found my freedom and my escape of the human condition. Also, among plants and animals, I found my inspiration for creating art. I studied all kinds of animals and plants, wondering through their diversity and organic forms, allowing all kinds of expressions and bodies, yet with no judgment over what is natural and what is not. In my teen-age years I moved to the Netherlands, and at a later age I learned about being transgender. My sexuality was always fluid. I both experimented with men and women. I did express myself for some years as a radical gay-queer. I fluctuated into becoming a transgender woman. My sexual and gender identity have been important in the inspiration for my art and made my art some way of “escapism” and desire for a better

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world. I felt very lonely for a long period of my life. My moments for creating paintings and drawings. I started presenting my art at psychedelic trance raves, as there my art could be as colourful and weird as I wanted it. Yet I wanted more. Later came the "underground queer parties" where I continued to do more what I wanted.

I like to draw creatures that do not exist. Presenting the magic of chimeras, human and animal hybrids. Presenting a creature more powerful than our current human form. I like to present to the public images that ask them to open up their minds about the possibilities of being. Other worlds, other realities, other genders, other sexualities and the naturality of it all. And yet I like to create that struggle within the viewer between beauty and weirdness. I like to play with humanoid presentations of people. Partly human, party animal, in the hope to take away from people some fear of the unknown or make them imagine: "What if?"

The images I create are often very colourful, and influenced by Guatemalan landscapes and Mayan art and culture. The county I grew up in. There might also be some degree of sarcasm in my art. The figures are

often connected among each other and there is unknown technology present in the images. I like to present images that connect dualities, such as organic tissue and mechanical limbs, and that incorporate sexual characteristics, in the hope that viewers will get more peace when considering the neutrality of nudity, sex and the diversity of bodies.

My art is a personal expression through which I can create what I desire to see. I do not intend to dictate any kind of political correctness, I only like to activate thoughts and emotions through the images that I offer. Making the viewers ask themselves how they react to such images. Hoping their mind might lead them to a place of co-existence with those things they do not understand.

"You're saying that's a real person … underneath?": The Horrors of the "Inorganic" in Jaume Collet-Serra's *House of Wax* (2005)

Robin Alex McDonald & Dan Vena

ABSTRACT: Picking up one win and two nominations at the 26th Golden Raspberry Awards for Worst Supporting Actress, Worst Picture and Worst Remake, it seems like *House of Wax* (2005) merits little academic attention. Although critical reception for the film was dismal, noteworthy public attention was given to the casting of Paris Hilton and to her memorable death sequence in which her character is impaled through the head with a pole. Although one can read Hilton's involvement as a transparently desperate attempt to capitalize on the heiress's cultural popularity at the time, we argue that the choice to cast Hilton – a celebrity who became well-known for her "plastic" or "fake" aesthetic – further emphasizes the narrative's preoccupation with material forms and properties. Interpreting the film's narrative as a classic tale of "good" versus "evil" (in which normative embodiment is coded as "good" and the desire to alter, re-configure, or de-"naturalize" the body as "evil"), this essay considers how *House of Wax* sheds light on normative fears of the body-as-object. It contends that in positioning desires for corporeal malleability as horrific or perverse, the film channels dominant cultural attitudes toward hyperfemme gender presentations and transgender bodies, both of which are discursively tied to the "inorganic."

KEYWORDS: horror, skin, inorganic, Paris Hilton, trans reading.

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of collectivity, and "the social"; and affect and emotion. Their writing has been recently published or is soon forthcoming in *n.paradoxa*, *TheatreForum*, *nomore-potlucks*, and the edited anthology *Queering Visual Cultures: Re-Presenting Sexual Politics on Stage and Screen*.

Dan Vena is completing his PhD in Cultural Studies at Queen's University. He is interested in visual and popular cultures, merging together trans, queer, and feminist approaches to horror cinema and superhero comics. He has published in *Studies in the Fantastic* and *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal* (with Robin Alex McDonald). His forthcoming work will be featured in *Transformative Works and Culture* and *The Dark Side: A Supervillain Reader*.

Picking up one win and two nominations at the 26th Golden Raspberry Awards for Worst Supporting Actress (Paris Hilton), Worst Picture, and Worst Remake, the 2005 post-teen horror-flick *House of Wax* seems to merit little academic attention. A loose remake of *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933) and *House of Wax (*1953), Jaume Collet-Serra's directorial debut film follows twin siblings Carly (Elisha Cuthbert) and Nick (Chad Michael Murray), and their accompanying college-aged friends as they attempt to survive the night in an unsettling ghost-town. Organized into the usual cast of teen-slasher character tropes, the supporting ensemble is comprised of Carly's desperate-for-commitment boyfriend Wade (Jared Padalecki), Nick's burn-out friend Dalton (Jon Abrahams), and the sexually promiscuous couple Paige (Paris Hilton) and Blake (Robert Ri'chard).

The film begins in a kitchen interior in 1974. A toddler eats Cheerios in a high chair while a feminine person (assumedly the child's mother, later identified as Trudy Sinclair) smokes a cigarette and pours boiling wax from a cooking pot into a mask mold. The quaintly uncanny domestic scene is interrupted when presumably the child's father enters carrying a thrashing second child who is "really being a monster again today" (Collet-Serra, 2005). Immediately, a critical binary is established between the "good" child and the "bad" child, the latter of whom must be secured to another high chair with duct tape and leather restraints. The bruising around the "bad" child's wrists makes clear that this obviously-traumatic event is

not a singular occurrence, but rather something that is interwoven into the everyday life of the family unit. The sound of the mother slapping the unruly child transitions into the title scene, followed by a subtitle indicating a forward leap to the "present day." Here, we find Carly and Paige eating French-fries at an off-road diner while on route to a football game in Louisiana with Nick, Wade, Dalton, and Blake in tow.

At a later point in the trip, Wade discovers his alternator belt has been cut, leaving him and Carly stranded while the rest of the Scooby-gang continue their journeys to the stadium. After being taken to a nearby abandoned hamlet in search of help, the couple stumble onto a run-down wax museum and peruse its freakish collection of waxworks. Although unbeknownst to Wade and Carly at the time, this gaudy art-deco edifice lies at the heart of what soon becomes their waking nightmare. A prized treasure of the late Trudy Sinclair, the museum is now operated by her two children, formerly-conjoined twins Vincent and Bo Sinclair (both played by Brian Van Holt), who continue to expand Trudy's collection by preying on unsuspecting travelers and turning their corpses into wax mannequins. One by one, the group falls victim to the Sinclairs' macabre craftsmanship until the two sets of twins (Nick and Carly / Vincent and Bo) face off in an epic CGI battle inside the house of wax, where Carly and Nick eventually emerge as the film's victors.

While reception for the film was dismal, with some critics admitting to finding a guilty enjoyment in the young adults' demises, noteworthy attention was given to the casting of Paris Hilton and to her memorable death sequence in which her character is impaled through the head with a pole. Proving to be the film's one-hit wonder scream queen, Hilton, quickly became *the* must-see spectacle of the picture. Ironically, Hilton is actually featured very little in the film, having the least amount of on-screen time out of the principle cast. It seems that her entire purpose in the film is to die. Certainly, we can read Hilton's casting as a transparently desperate attempt to capitalize on the heiress's cultural popularity at the time, thereby boosting the film's theatrical run and eventual rental revenues. However, within a film that revolves around the anxiety of material forms and properties (specifically of wax's ability to both break-down and impersonate flesh), the choice of Paris Hilton – a celebrity who became well-known for her "plastic" or "fake" aesthetic – as a cameo further emphasizes the narrative's preoccupation with the fragility of "the real."

Interpreting the film's narrative as a classic tale of "good" versus "evil" (in which normative embodiment is coded as 'good' and the desire to alter, re-configure, or de-"naturalize" the body as "evil"), this essay considers how *House of Wax* sheds light on normative fears of the body-as-object. It contends that in positioning desires for corporeal malleability as horrific or perverse, the film channels dominant cultural attitudes toward hyperfemme gender presentations and transgender bodies, both of which are discursively tied to the "inorganic." In order to do so, we consider the film's representations of seemingly disparate phenomena – from two headed figurines, to oversized pairs of scissors, to human-wax mannequin hybrids – in an effort to contemplate how such images of medical horror paraphernalia and ambiguous materialities construct a diegetic world of semiotic uncertainty, such that the boundaries of flesh must be challenged and reconsidered.

"Anyone need a hand?"

Often viewed as one of the trashiest or most trivial of film genres, perhaps only rivaled by pornography, horror cinema is frequently lambasted by critics and popular movie-going audiences alike for its reliance on seemingly artless and excessively violent or grotesque spectacles. While many may be happy to see this genre buried for good, it maintains the pesky ability to persist, to repeatedly return from the grave or, rather, the garbage heap. If anything, this throw-away genre seems to be one of the most recyclable in its refusal to be cultural disposed of, with the number of iterations in the *Halloween* or *Friday the 13th* movie franchises serving as a testament to the genre's internal proficiency to recycle its own material. Though efforts amongst film scholars to save the genre's reputation range in effort, with a stronger emphasis often placed on psychoanalytic interpretations (i.e. focusing on Freud's theories of the uncanny or repression), feminist film scholar Linda Williams (1991) offers an alternative approach that centres the (female) body as the locus of mimetic spectacle; the point of origin and departure for the horror film.

Drawing from Carol Clover's earlier feminist readings of the genre, Williams positions horror (alongside melodrama and pornography) as one of the three "body genres" because of the physiological reactions it seeks to provoke from its audience. These reactions, Williams argues, are achieved through the spectacle of the (female) body on screen, whereby excessive emotion (as in melodrama), sexuality

(as in pornography) and violence (as in horror) overwhelm the spectator by depicting the body as both uncontrollable and abject. Importantly, as Williams notes, the success of these genres can be measured by "the degree to which the audience sensation mimics what is seen on the screen" (1991, p.4), meaning that the bodily excesses these genres depict are not merely gratuitous but *intentionally*-gratuitous, in that they aim to close the distance between the spectator and the object on screen. In following this formulation, we suggest that for *House of Wax* to function as a horror film, it must presume as its intended audience a viewer who understands any threat of (surgical) modification to their body as a "real" source of fear and anxiety. Among the potentially lengthy list of viewers who fall outside of this intended audience are trans/non-binary individuals (who may recognize the boundaries of the sexed/gendered body as more flexible than cis viewers), in addition to disabled, chronically ill, and/or *mad* viewers, as well as members of the extreme body modification community or of cultures with differing views toward bodily modification. The many reminders of the body's materiality and its related capacity for transformation, disfigurement, or dissolution throughout the film is assumedly what is intended to produce the affective, memetic response in audiences. This response is therefore heavily dependent on audience members who are heavily wedded to their bodies as "natural" and coherent, and are able to see themselves in/as the "victims" represented on screen.

The film's first alarming instance of "body-horror" clocks in at twenty-one minutes, serving as a transition from an exposition-heavy first act to an anticipated death-by-numbers second-act sequence. Before leaving for the big game, Carly and Paige slip away into the woods for a pre-road trip bathroom break, only to be confronted by the same putrid smell the group noticed when they arrived at their campsite. Determined to discover the source of the smell, Carly leads Paige further into the trees before falling down an embankment head-first into a large pit of rotting animal carcasses. While attempting to crawl out of the pit, Carly spots what appears to be a human hand rising up from the pile. Her horror is only temporarily alleviated when an ominous roadkill collector named Lester (Damon Herriman) arrives to dispose of several dead animals and explains that the hand does not belong to a human corpse but to a discarded mannequin buried beneath the rotting roadkill. Popping the hand off the mannequin and waving it to evidence its lifelessness, Lester shouts at Carly and the horrified group, "It's not real, see?" emphasiz-

ing that, within this world, appearances are not to be trusted (Collet-Serra, 2005). The motif of duplicity saturates the diegetic atmosphere to the extent that all matter is consistently placed into question: Is it flesh? Plastic? Wax? Furthermore, not only are appearances rendered untrustworthy but human flesh itself can be easily replicated, appropriated and even replaced by alternative materials. The stability of flesh (and by proxy, the human body) is rendered fragile in that it can rot (as the animal corpses do), whereas plastic and wax can endure (like the mannequin hand). This juxtaposition between organic matter and plastic, the latter of which literally sticks out like a sore thumb in this scene, is continually evoked to serve as the central source of visual horror in *House of Wax*.

Crucial to the film is thus a frightened preoccupation with competing surface level aesthetics and the potential terrors that can be buried underneath. As Carly's terrified reaction to the realistic mannequin hand illustrates, the confusion between the "real" and the "fake" or the "living" and the "dead" occurs when the material form of the body is robbed of its definitional transparency. Assumedly, bodies ought to reveal themselves as truthfully as possible; flesh ought to signal the human, just as the gendered body ought to be signaled by a particularly sexed morphology. This act of announcement, which in the case of the film is played out via the surface of the skin, is a precarious one at best. As Jack Halberstam notes, "skin is at once the most fragile of boundaries and the most stable of signifiers" (1995, p.163). A contradictory vehicle of malleability and assumedly stable meaning-making, the surface of the skin always carries the potential for disruption – the broken promise of the skin matched by the breaking wound to the epidermis. Thus, to encounter a form that approximates human flesh but is not is to undo the staunch investment in a stable ontology that can be easily discerned via sight. The idea that we cannot trust our own vision (the sense that ableist society tells us *should be* most trustworthy) to determine what something *is* not only serves to produce moments of terror and shock in *this* particular film, but is foundational to the genre of wax films and the horror genre overall.

According to Michelle E. Bloom (2003), films that focus on the materiality of wax remain contingent on an affective experience of psychological dissolution defined by the confusion between reality and illusion (p. XIII). The wax film, in this respect, exploits not only the material incoherence of wax as a substance (which can be melted, molded, solidified, and reshaped) but also the unstable semiotic

value of skin itself to produce the necessary thrills and chills. To this extent, the wax film is a literalization of the basic horror formula, which, as Thomas M. Sipos (2010) contends must feature an unnatural threat within the context of a natural universe (p.6). The initial image of the pit, which serves as the film's first real scare, with its repulsive stew of tangled antlers, bloody carcasses, and emergent mannequin hand, sets up the film's fixation on ontological instability and the threat to the unnatural. Its location, just outside the town of Ambrose, is important geographically as a physical warning to wayfaring tourists of the macabre town to come, but also diegetically in that it sets up the film's central preoccupation with definitional uncertainty. As the audience moves with the characters from the pit into town, we become privy to the results of such categorical crisis.

"It's a good knife."

Described by the menacing roadkill collector, Lester, who first takes Carly and Wade into town, Ambrose was once considered "pretty nice before the interstate came in" (Collet-Serra, 2005). The visual image of the interstate cutting through the town invokes the idea of a surgical slashing whereby the original materiality of the referent is fundamentally altered beyond initial recognition. In this respect, Ambrose exists as a town post-transition, as a place marked by intervention that cannot return to its previous state. As Susan Stryker (1994) writes about transsexual surgeries, the body created by the scalpel's intervention is always "something more, and "something other" than originally intended by medical makers (p.242). While locating her observations in larger debates over the agency and autonomy of trans subjects, particularly in relation to the hegemonic and totalizing power of the medical institution, Stryker's words may also serve as an apt description of Ambrose's transition. It is the act of the cut, of the interstate rupturing the stability of a once "nice" town that serves as the moment of no return, and thereby creates a place that exists as something altogether Other. The cut both within the diegetic world of the film, and as localized upon the trans body, signals the exact moment of definitional confusion (the scar or suture becoming the site of both injury and healing), the very moment of ontological destabilization, and the origins of monstrosity.

It is the cut that causes the boundaries or structures of intelligibility to blur in the first place, and which figures as an overwhelming producer of narrative ten-

sion within the film. For example; Wade's fan belt is cut at the campsite; conjoined twins Bo and Vincent Sinclair were cut apart; Dr. Sinclair, the twins' father, was notorious for performing dangerous surgical procedures; Carly has her finger cut off by Bo; and Vincent cuts off Dalton's head before procuring his corpse. In a particularly visceral death sequence, Vincent surprises Carly's boyfriend Wade after Wade enters the siblings' home and rummages around the late Victor Sinclair's medical oddities and surgical tools. Creeping up through a loose floorboard, Vincent uses a pair of oversized scissors to snip Wade's Achilles tendon, resulting in a sudden gush of blood and Wade's immediate collapse to the ground. After Wade paws around the floor and nearby tables for something to defend himself, he is able to make it back onto his feet for only a moment before Vincent charges him. In seconds, we see three quickly edited close-up cuts of blades entering various locations on Wade's body and hear the sharp "snip snip snip" sounds of steel on steel.

The spectacle of Wade's death, with its clinical medical setting (Dr. Sinclair's old operating room), can be read in relation to an earlier macabre cinematic obsession with seeing the literal and conceptual dissection of on-screen bodies (Steinbock, 2012). Described as participating in a "culture of dissection" (Sawday in Steinbock, p.167), the backdrop of which the fascination with transsexual subjects like Lili Elbe simultaneously began to manifest, this early cinema of attractions took to showing the cutting up of bodies as a means of entertainment (Steinbock, p.168). The legacy of this fixation on the disfigurement of bodies can be seen in *House of Wax* (and the horror genre in general) such that instances of intervention become spectacularized, rupturing or interrupting the narrative in favor of showcasing "pure" cinematic violence. This interruption positions any act of cutting into the skin as a momentous, unexpected, or "unnatural" event; in the film's imaginary, all cuts lead to monstrous ending.

"What'd I tell ya, huh? Ain't your work more real now?"

Before Wade's death, when Carly and Wade initially explore the House of Wax, they find amongst a collection of oddly posed mannequins a small collection of figurines with human heads and lizard bodies perched on the mantel. Curious about

the objects, Carly turns one over and notices it has been signed "Vincent." As horror theorists like Xavier Aldana Reyes (2014) and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996) note, the hybrid anatomy of most monsters, their resistance to easy or clear-cut classifications or definitions, is inherently disturbing (Reyes, p.4). In his seven theses of monsters, Cohen (1996) argues that monsters are in fact definitionally constituted by this hybrid ambiguity, suggesting that the monster: "is the harbinger of the category crisis" (p.6), "dwells at the gates of difference" (p.7), "polices the borders of the possible" (p.12), and "stands at the threshold of becoming" (p.20). In *House of Wax*, the amorphousness of monstrosity leaks into the diegetic environment, as signaled by the figurines that adorn the museum, enveloping the characters into a world of formal and semiotic uncertainty. Stephen Hunter's (2005) observation that the film envisions a "wax-normative world" helps to elucidate this universe's horrific blurring of categorical distinctions, exposing our own world's desperate insistence on arbitrarily-defined systems of meaning (n.p.). The fluidity and moldability of wax – as well as its hybrid state as both/neither a liquid and a solid – make it a fitting metaphor for trans and non-binary, genderfluid, genderfuck, or otherwise gender non-conforming individuals who upset distinctions between 'male' and 'female' genders and/or sexes. The connection between "unclassifiability" and monstrosity thus reveals deep-seated cultural anxieties that gender deviance will lead to the undoing of all world order, or what Gayle Rubin (1984) calls the "struggle over where to draw the line" (p.154)

Playing both monster and maker in this film, the creator of the figurines, Vincent, serves as the physicalization of this undoing. Although Vincent is gendered using masculine pronouns and titles (i.e. as Bo's "brother") throughout the film, their many feminized physical and performative traits support aforementioned ideas of the monster as an inherent troubler of normative categories. It is worth noting, for instance, that following the surgery Dr. Victor Sinclair performed in order to separate his conjoined children, Vincent re-crafts their own face to create a softly-contoured wax mask framed by long tresses of dark hair. Furthermore, following Paige's maiming of Vincent's face during a struggle, Vincent returns home, enters the kitchen, picks up the metal toaster, and proceeds to use its reflective surface as a mirror while they re-shape their wax cheek with a hot spoon in a manner reminiscent of applying make-up. Combined with our introductory scene to Vincent's wax-making methods, which depicts them meticulously sculpting the

breast area of a (culturally-intelligible) female wax figure, Vincent's efforts to (re-) produce their own looks in a feminized or gender-fluid manner lends a potential trans reading to this character, a reading that is further strengthened by turning to Stryker's (1994) essay, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage."

In Stryker's renowned essay, the author draws connections between Frankenstein's monster and her own experiences as a transsexual woman, particularly as each relates to the technologies of medical science that enable the existence of both ways of being. Like Stryker and Frankenstein's monster, Vincent's "monstrosity" (a word which Stryker re-claims in order to dispel the shame of being discursively linked with "non-human material Being" [p.240]) was also born from scientific experimentation when their face became disfigured through the separation surgery; Vincent is also largely silent throughout the film, and is therefore subjected to the labelling of their identity by others; they compile newspaper clippings about their surgical history akin to the monster who reads Frankenstein's journals and Stryker who mines medical archives; and, perhaps most importantly, both Vincent and their waxwork creations disturb the boundaries between flesh and wax, creation and destruction, pleasure and horror, "natural" and "unnatural."

Although Vincent's categorical disturbance positions them as monstrous, it is arguably the rage that they harbor toward their "victims" that makes them not only a psychological threat (i.e. a threat to one's normative worldview) but also a physical threat (i.e. one that could do literal damage to the body.) For Stryker, transgender rage is fueled by the exclusion of transsexuals from the "human community" and is thus appropriately directed at the "conditions in which [they] must struggle to exist," thereby constituting a powerful affect through which trans people can resist dehumanization and oppression (p.238). However, in *House of Wax*, "transgender rage" is shown as motivation for extreme acts of violence and murder as well as a source of perversion. Although both Bo and Vincent commit such murders within the film, it is Vincent who goes one step further by actually "desecrating" the corpses by making them the infrastructures for their wax mannequins. In doing so, they not only expose the body as a type of raw material, but also carefully recycle its form into an eerie hybrid of organic-meets-inorganic; an uncontainable modelling process that defies categorical boundaries.

"Hey, you guys gonna have sex?"

Within a diegetic environment in which the theme of the moldability of bodies and fears of non-normative corporeality pervade the entire visual and narrative structure, Paris Hilton's death sequence, which sees the heiress face off against (trans) monster Vincent, becomes *the* must-see moment of the film – not least because of the celebratory audience reaction. In providing a synopsis for this sequence, it is difficult to untether the off-screen individual from her on-screen persona as the entire 'pleasure' or impact of this sequence depends on its textual dissolution, an outright bleeding of reality into fiction whereby Paris-as-star and Paige-as-character collapse into each other.

Paris/Paige's death sequence begins when she is awoken by a breeze entering her camping tent through its open flaps. Upon flipping the switch on her lantern, she (and the audience) is met with a close-up of Vincent's hollow-eyed face, made all the more frightening by its mask-like quality. As the sequence continues, Paris/Paige escapes the tent and sprints into a nearby parking garage where she arms herself with a long shaft of piping. She flees along a grated catwalk until her bare heel is punctured by a knife shooting up from beneath the grates. She lands face-down on the grate and nearly misses being stabbed again, this time in the breast and hands (Paris' costuming in pink lingerie and an open bathrobe make the scene's blocking particularly apparent). Finally, she retreats into an unlocked car where she manages to wound the side of Vincent's face with the pipe. Causing merely superficial damage to her attacker, she escapes from the vehicle but is soon impaled through the forehead by the same pole. Dying, she falls forward onto her knees, blood spurting from her wound onto the pavement below.

Allegedly, cinematic audiences across the country erupted into applause at Paris's character's death scene. As one movie critic wrote at the time, "Audiences will flock to [see this film] for two reasons – either they want to see Paris Hilton in her undies, or they want to see her horribly killed" (O'Hara, 2005, n.p.). Even Hilton herself was excited by her on-screen debut, speaking openly about having the "coolest death scene in the movie" (Smithouser, n.d., n.p.). According to another review, promotion for Hilton's appearance in the movie even inspired a line of "See Paris Die" t-shirts (Smithouser, n.d., n.p.), which moviegoers could presumably wear as they watched Hilton meet her Teen Choice award-winning end.

We cannot help but attribute a significant portion of this reaction to Paris's then-status as the pinnacle of wealth and ostentation, but the desire for a class revolution does not alone explain such a joyous response. Incited not only by the violent death of a woman, but specifically of a high-femme, heavily made-up and platinum-blonde woman, audience glee exposed the widespread cultural vitriol for Hilton's doll-like "plastic" femininity. Though Paris has denied having any interest in pursuing actual plastic surgery, noting that she is "very proud" to be "all natural," her alignment with Barbie dolls lends her a kind of iconic plastic aesthetic within the popular imaginary (Pasquini, 2016, n.p.). Cemented by her 2015 photoshoot for the Italian luxury brand *Moschino*, in which the star posed in a Mattel-esque-patterned jumpsuit throughout an all-pink playhouse, Hilton's quintessential "plastic" look has been integral to her persona throughout the new millennium. She has explicitly stated that Barbie is her fashion icon and that she takes any comparisons to the classic figurine as a compliment, revealing her enthusiastic embrace of the objectification that comes with being a high-profile celebrity as well as the intentionality behind her performance of herself-as-doll.

Importantly, Hilton's ability to approximate the Barbie-doll aesthetic is only made possible because of her own whiteness – what Colin Salter (2013) refers to as whiteness's "ability to absorb any potentially destabilising challenges" (p.48). As Salter notes, "The malleability of whiteness, its variability and changing contours, is located in its ability to adapt [while] the normativity of whiteness, the apparent universality, is rooted in an ability to absorb (co-opt) difference, in adapting to changes and societal variations" (pp.47–48). Thus, for the most part, the potential threat of Hilton's 'un-organic' hyperfemme gender presentation is mitigated by the adaptivity of her whiteness (in contrast to the static-ness that is demanded of the [racial] stereotype [Bhabha, 1983]). That said, though whiteness affords her a certain amount of cultural leverage in approximating the "Barbie" aesthetic, Hilton's practice of self-objectification does not render her impervious to misogynist critique (if anything, it seems to construct her as a "proper" target of this vitriol).

For instance, the hypersexualization of Hilton – most notably following her infamous sex-tape, *1 Night in Paris,* released one year prior to the premiere of *House of Wax* – is intimately bound up with her identity as a woman and the highly-gendered process of (self-)objectification. The lengthiest shot in her character's death-scene in *House of Wax* is a low-angle view of her lifeless, blood-streaked face im-

paled by a pole. As one YouTube commenter's remark that this "isn't the first time she's taken wood though [sic] the face" (ACJ97F, 2016) evidences, the penetrative element of this death sequence is likely intentional. The scene ends with Paris on her knees, propped up by the pole through her forehead. Her killer takes out a handheld video recorder and proceeds to film her corpse, further conflating Paris' real-world sex-acts with her character's spearing. In displacing sex onto the violent act, the supposed "clean-cut" ontological structure of the film is destabilized and the picture is solidified as a "skin flick;" a part-pornographic-film, part-horror-film wherein the surface of the body becomes "the movie screen, the destination of the gaze, the place that glows in the dark, the violated site of visual pleasure" (Halberstam, 1995, p.165). Here, hypersexualization and objectification work in tandem to de-humanize Hilton, thus justifying the violence against her character (further emphasized by comments on her death scene Youtube video, including one commenter's statement that it's "Too sad that it's just a movie" [Dark Angel, 2016], and another's response to the question "Why would you want the death of a human being?" [Diego Castro, 2016] with "paris hilton is human being? [sic]" [musyarofah1, 2016]).

"They had three."

During the climax of the film, Carly and Nick murder Vincent and Bo as a raging inferno engulfs the house of wax, destroying the corpse-mannequins inside and flooding the streets of Ambrose with molasses rivers of melting wax. Effectively restoring the Symbolic order, this ending serves to vanquish the "wax-normative" universe of the film and re-position flesh-centric corporeality as "naturally" superior. But as with many horror films, *House of Wax*, refuses to provide any true sense of resolution. In the final scene, Carly and Nick are driven out of Ambrose in the back of an ambulance while a police transistor radio can be heard as a voiceover: "Sheriff? …Ran the Sinclair family through the CDIC. Trudy and the doctor didn't have two sons. They had three." (Collet-Serra, 2005) At this point, the ambulance drives past the roadkill-collector as he feeds his mutt from the back of his pick-up truck, cuing the audience to re-read this character as a third Sinclair sibling.

If the film is read as an expression of cisgender anxieties about the instability of genders and bodies, then this ending succeeds in interrupting the binary set-

up of two sets of twin siblings with the unsettling possibility of a "third;" an apt metaphor for the ways in which trans/non-binary identities haunt the fictitious cisnormative sex/gender binary. Indeed, as this essay has sought to demonstrate, the fears associated with surgical modifications, the (gender ambiguous) monster, and the hybridization of flesh and wax only exist because they play into a deep-seated knowledge that the "natural" structural and semiotic coherency of the body is an illusion. As Stryker's (1994) warns: "the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of the privilege you seek to maintain for yourself at my expense" (pp.240–241).

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