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Mirrors, Monsters, Metaphors: Transgender Rhetorics and Dysphoric Knowledge

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Mirrors, Monsters, Metaphors: Transgender Rhetorics and Dysphoric Knowledge

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Magister Artium, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2006

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By
Anson Koch-Rein

This dissertation locates marginalized forms of knowledge in recurrent metaphors circulating in the rhetorics of transgender experience. A gendered identification that is not naturalized generates an intensified pressure to speak (about) gender in the absence of sanctioned vocabulary. This proliferation makes transgender discourse a particularly useful object for studying how gendered meaning is made. Investigating the rhetorical, cultural, and political work of a persistent set of transgender tropes, my project introduces the category of '*dysphoric knowledge'* to turn gender dysphoria from a diagnosis into a conceptual tool to theorize minoritized and pathologized claims to knowledge and embodiment of gender.

The project begins by tracing the medical history of the term Gender Dysphoria and its role in Transgender Studies debates about the trope of the "wrong body," making the case for dysphoric knowledge as a way of rethinking the field through a lens of transgender rhetorics and knowledge production. Chapter two offers a reading of shame and disgust in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* through Silvan Tomkins' affect theory to argue that the monster trope in transgender discourse negotiates non-normative embodiment and its perceptions in the social world. Chapter three argues that ghosts and hauntings in transgender autobiography appear as figures of disrupted temporal and pronominal narrative coherence, historical loss, and disembodiment, while mirrors such as in *The Well of Loneliness* stage scenes of dysphoric experiences of gender that find no reflection in mirror models of knowledge. Chapter four discusses the skin suits of violent transsexual movie tropes (*The Skin I Live In*, *Silence of the Lambs*) and the cloth skins of a transgender novel (*Stone Butch Blues*) to bring out the different logics of skin and clothing as rhetorically gender-identity-laden surfaces: Clothing operates according to a metaphorical logic, while skin operates metonymically – in turn allowing for epistemological and ontological claims, respectively. The final chapter uses the examples of Peter Pan and the figure of the transgender "boi"/boy and of transgender women performing and re-writing Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* to argue that such gender-specific tropes negotiate the place of transfemininity and transmasculinity in feminism and can help articulate an inclusive vision of feminism.

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> There, I hoped someday to be reduced to a pure brain suspended in the rarefied atmosphere (Raz Link 34).

First and foremost, my deepest thanks go to Michael Moon, Elizabeth Goodstein, Lynne Huffer, and Gayle Salamon for their patience, generosity, and support. I could not imagine a better committee for this project and I am truly grateful for all the advice and encouragement along the way. I am also indebted to Elizabeth Wilson for her helpful feedback on what would become the Frankenstein chapter when it was still in its infancy. Dana White and Regine Jackson's interdisciplinary research design course first forced me to articulate this project's concrete shape and the final dissertation's form is still indebted to their guidance and feedback in that course.

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> I do not like your Utopia, if there are to be no dogs (H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*).

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I. Introduction

> The two health professionals who evaluated me gave me permission for the surgeries I wanted. Just as important, they and my doctor also chose for me a new name – transsexual. With my new name came a new language to describe how I felt, what I wanted, and why. Using that new language was my choice. It gave me words to describe the indescribable, explain the inexplicable, to say what I had no words for. They weren't the right words, but they were something. So I told my mother I was a transsexual, and I was having a sex-change operation (Link and Raz 143).
>
> Not everybody has the 'gift of gab,' and not every transsexual is articulate. But it can be developed; and if your native talent along these lines is limited, read a book or two on public speaking. Not that there will necessarily be any need for you to hit the lecture trail, as there was for me, but merely to explain your position to a skeptical world effectively (Grossman 50).
>
> Because the lives of those who embody non-normative sex or gender depend, often quite literally, on what meaning gets made, the stakes for them are much higher than for others (Elliot 9).

FTM[1] autobiographer Aaron Raz Link's acquisition of words "to describe the indescribable, explain the inexplicable, to say what I had no words for," Patricia Elliot's noting that "the stakes are much higher" on what gendered meaning gets made, and Paula Grossman's preparation of her fellow transsexuals for the rhetorical pressures of a "skeptical world" all point to a scenario in which transgender[2] people are faced with a particularly powerful “incitement to speak” (Foucault, *HoS I* 18 - who was, notably referring to speaking "sex"), to produce gender rhetorically. A gendered identification (as one of two, more, or other) that is not in the first instance substantiated by the model of “sex=gender,” which is understood to be ‘literal,’ generates an intensified pressure to rhetorically produce gender and face the resultant complexities of self-description and self-naming. When Denise Riley writes that “only under the most baroque circumstances would I have to utter, ‘I’m a woman’” (Riley, *Selves* 60) – and this gives her some relief from the trappings of self-narration – then the fact that for many a trans woman daily life is full of such “baroque” moments underscores the stakes and frequency of debates about transgender language and rhetorics.

---

[1] The acronyms FTM and MTF for transgender men and transgender women, respectively, are more widely used than their long forms ("Female-To-Male" and "Male-To-Female"), in part because as acronyms marking a trans-identification rather than a transitional stage, they have acquired a meaning that goes beyond the binary poles and linear trajectory that is implied in the long forms. All these terms will appear throughout this dissertation. Other terms, such as trans men, trans women, transpeople etc. (some authors I quote use the compound noun versions rather than a "trans" as adjective spelling), will have their turns, too. While I am aware that some individuals identify as MTM (masculine-to-male), and many folks are adamant about asserting themselves as just men or women, without any disrespect for their individual identifications, which I would honor unequivocally on the individual level, I cannot use such language in this context, because I need general language to draw attention to the specificity of the way certain people's bodies are categorized in a logic of binary sex. I have to use some marker of that to name this categorization, not in order to repeat, but to draw attention to the violent reduction and essentialism of the process.

These debates often read transgender metaphors as false consciousness (from a variety of positions) and overlook the ways in which the incitement to speak makes the rhetoric produced an easy target. As trans woman Beth Elliot writes in her autobiography about her non-trans feminist critics: “We’re easy targets for this – it is extremely difficult to explain something as subjective as an ‘inapppropriate’ gender identity without using politically loaded cultural referents” (Nettick 5). These questions crystallize most strikingly around what, with Aren Aizura, we might call “persistent” metaphors (Aizura 139). Whether transgender people are betrayed by the *mirror*, trapped in the *wrong body*, surgically-modified by a *Doctor Frankenstein*, denounced as his *monster* or claiming the monster's eloquent revolt, language around and discussions of transgender seem to be fraught with a set of recurrent tropes. This dissertation takes up a number of these remarkably persistent and ubiquitous transgender tropes that have variously been mentioned, noticed, reproduced, argued against, and rewritten, but never systematically addressed or made the focus of a study. In doing so, it takes "metaphor seriously as a way of making cultural meaning" (Young 12) and sets itself apart from positions like sociologist Zowie Davy's. In her recent book *Recognizing Transsexuals: Personal, Political and Medicolegal Embodiment*, Davy dismisses metaphor as the literarily frivolous to the 'literal' body, which is especially obvious when she criticizes Susan Stryker's seminal Frankenstein essay (see ch. II) for not making "bodies of difference, with sociocentric multiplicities, appear in her own work" and leaving "them as literary metaphors" (Davy 54). Taking metaphor seriously precisely as a way to make bodies of difference appear, this dissertation investigates the rhetorical, cultural, and political work of these transgender tropes in and across literary, autobiographical, academic, and cinematic cultural forms and to theorize them as productive of what I will call *dysphoric knowledge*.

---

[2] Since the late 1980s/early 1990s, the term *transgender* has become an umbrella term in Anglo-American (and increasingly internationalized) activist, community, and academic parlance as referring to phenomena such as transsexuality, cross-dressing, cross-gender identification, some aspects of intersexuality and homosexuality, gender diversity etc. As an academic field, Transgender Studies “is concerned with anything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy, the subjectively experienced relationship between a gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance, and the cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood” (Stryker, “(De)Subjugated” 3).

Previous Literature

While, as Sally Hines notes, "the question of the 'wrong body' may be read as the theoretical lens through which meanings of transgender are presently contested" (Hines 60), this does not mean that much attention is paid to it as a trope, rather than a term of theoretical contestation, employed and refuted as a trope of the various meanings contested. Moreover, the 'wrong body' is often set so central, either as subject to ideology critique or "taken at face value as if it expressed in some straightforward way the truth of the body with no subject to name, to interpret, or to question it" (Elliot 108), that the numerous other transgender tropes get – if any – much less attention. There is, thus, no study with this project's particular focus and approach in existence. Marking two very different moments in the development of Transgender Studies as a field, Jay Prosser's first book, *Second Skins*, which stepped into new territory, and Gayle Salamon's much more recent *Assuming a Body* are the two monographs that have shaped the conversation that this dissertation is taking up – and that have in many ways shaped my own thinking about the language of transgender experience.

Jay Prosser in his 1998 book was very much concerned with transsexual narratives and in particular with using "transition" to denote an "ontological condition of transsexuality" (Prosser, *Second Skins* 5). Partly in response to the way certain strands of Feminist and Queer Theory had used transgender as a prime example of gender performativity, Prosser staked a claim for transsexual narratives' "bid to the referentiality of sex" and sought to "allow transsexuality through its narratives to bring into view the materiality of the body" (Prosser, *Second Skins* 12). While Prosser's book touched on (but didn't focus on) a number of transgender tropes, made a very valuable intervention into a certain strand of Queer Theory, and as the first explicitly transsexual cultural studies perspective is a milestone in Transgender Studies, my project clearly departs from his in terms of sources, methods, and objectives insofar as *Second Skins* is engaged in reading narratives (and photographs) in search of grounding ontological claims. Jay Prosser would come back to revise the thesis of his first book and move from a model of redemptive/triumphant referentiality to one of inevitable, constitutive failure: “This failure to be real is the transsexual real” (Prosser, *Light* 172) (see below, ch. III). However, in grounding this failure in the shortcomings of phalloplastic surgeries, Prosser sticks with a model of referentiality in which language and photography move from materializing a transsexual triumph of coherent gendering to referencing a loss (Prosser, *Light* 181). Prosser’s work has been influential on my project in terms of taking seriously the importance and persistence of transgender metaphors. At the same time, Prosser stops short of actually analyzing the work these transgender tropes do, because his claims rest on disclaiming said work as one of meaning-making and insisting their work is naming “simply what transsexuality feels like” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 69). Contrary to Prosser, Lucas Cassidy Crawford argues that “no bodily sensation carries its own self-evident meaning or orders for action prior to our reformulating these affects into narratives” (Crawford 132). My project is interested in these reformulations, in the metaphors that they seem to cluster around.

Gayle Salamon’s *Assuming a Body* presents a phenomenological and psychoanalytic take on gendered embodiment that accounts for transgender – and thus artfully resolves one of the most obvious theoretical difficulties with Prosser: How to preserve the political stance of affirming transgender claims to realness, while letting go of a reductive notion of ontology. Salamon describes her book as follows:

> *Assuming a Body* is a project that works questions of embodiment through phenomenology (primarily the work of Merleau-Ponty), psychoanalysis (the work of Freud and Paul Schilder), and queer theory in order to consider how each of these disciplines conceives of the body. I seek to challenge the notion that the materiality of the body is something to which we have unmediated access, something of which we can have epistemological certainty, and contend that such epistemological uncertainty can have great use, both ethically and politically, in the lives of the non-normatively gendered (Salamon, *Assuming* 1).

Unlike Henry Rubin's sociological use of phenomenology in *Self-Made Men* (2003) that reads Merleau-Ponty somewhat cursorily and posits a very strong self-identical subject, "Salamon is unwilling to concede ground to positivist identity discourse even as she labors to prove that alternate embodiments of gender are, in fact, phenomenologically and experientially real" (Hsu 358).

Not all references to phenomenology by scholars interested in transgender phenomena are as in-depth. Where Merleau-Ponty used phantom limbs as an example (Merleau-Ponty 93), Henry Rubin and others have turned the example into a purported explanation (Rubin, *Self-Made Men* 29) and comparison for transgender embodiment (Prosser, *Second Skins* 84; Cavanagh, "Teacher Transsexuality" 380). Such "having" a gender is like "having" an arm – phantom or otherwise (phantom pain does not usually feature in these discussions) – analogies are introducing a new metaphor into the mix, which, while seemingly coming with phenomenological credentials (arguably its raison d'etre), comes with a new set of problems. With the strong body-part focus of the phantom limb, these approaches are reducing their own stance to a very limited notion of sexed embodiment (AND gender), producing self-contradictory accounts while discounting the specificities of a neurological and experiential phenomenon that – like so many disability metaphors – has a life of its own. While I agree with Zowie Davy that the lost limb is a mistaken analysis for transgender embodiment, her criticism of Henry Rubin's use of the phantom limb sounds itself ableist and points to the pitfalls of free-floating disability metaphorics:

> 'Phantom limb' suggests an ongoing, albeit intermittent, 'natural' psychic malfunction rather than a metaphysical problem. By using this concept, Rubin unduly pathologizes the Transsexual subject (Davy 66).

It should be possible to point to the difference and specificity of these experiences without discussing it in terms of pathologizations (and whether or not those are undue). Reducing phenomenology to phantom limbs seems unproductive.

Salamon is much more interested in phenomenology and careful in her reading of Merleau-Ponty. Her project is about making phenomenology and psychoanalysis useful for transgender studies, a move which has made her book an important milestone in theoretical complexity for the field (and freed it from notions of transgender exceptionalism[3]): "Of what use might psychoanalytic theory be to those of us trying to bring attention to transgender within contemporary discussions of embodiment and gender?" (Salamon, *Assuming* 13). And, vice versa, it brings transgender into the view of psychoanalytic and phenomenological theories of embodiment. While *Assuming a Body* has "rhetorics of materiality" in its subtitle, the emphasis on how materiality is thought in transgender rhetorics, and the goals of Salamon's study are somewhat different from, albeit not in contradiction to, my own project. My dissertation stays with transgender rhetorics rather than moving to the language of larger phenomenological and psychoanalytic models that require a careful hedging of these theories' more transphobic and gender-normative implications. And so while, for instance, the discussion of the mirror in chapter III requires an engagement with Lacan's "mirror stage" – as well as a number of his readers – the focus will be on situating this metaphor in a larger cultural framework and in analyzing its implications for any emergent notion of dysphoric knowledge. Unlike Patricia Elliot, who writes that "[a]s Prosser and other transsexuals explore aspects of their psychic lives in more detail, there is a need for an increasingly sophisticated language for making sense of the knowledge they produce", I am not convinced that this language is necessarily psychoanalytic (Elliot 111) – nor am I convinced that the interiorizing language of 'psychic lives' is necessarily more ('increasingly') sophisticated than the struggles with interior/exteriority and boundaries in such tropes as the "wrong body." Instead, my project will propose to read transgender metaphors themselves as a "sophisticated language" through which to understand the (dysphoric) knowledge produced.

---

[3] Sheila Cavanagh comments on Salamon's book: "Some bodily egos may depart from material coordinates more than others (and this is certainly the case for transsexuals), but regardless of a person's status as trans or cissexual, everyone must negotiate a disjuncture between an internalized body image and the external contours of the body" (Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms* 46).

The wrong body trope, as Sally Hines noted above, has been subject of debate throughout Transgender Studies including, for instance, in work by Jason Cromwell (1999) and Lucas Cassidy Crawford (2008). Crawford criticizes what he perceives as Prosser's turning of the wrong body into transsexuality's "definitive condition" (Crawford 132) and Cromwell disputes the "wrong body" at some length in the language sections of his ethnographic study of transgender men:

> the idea has *been imposed upon transpeople by those who control access to medical technologies and have controlled discourses about transpeople*. Some individuals *may believe or may come to believe* that they are in the wrong body or at least use language that imparts the same meaning (Cromwell 104) [my emphasis; AKR].

Cromwell describes the wrong body in terms of false consciousness: An externally imposed idea that "some people" may come to believe. Similarly, philosopher Christine Overall suggests that it is possible that "trans people have ended up adopting the metaphor, to the point of even believing in it" (Overall 23) and wants to conceptualize gender transition in the supposedly more accurate language of "personal aspiration" instead. In this view, those who use the language of the wrong body trope are merely repeating a discourse they have no control over and that has not only no relation to their 'actual' experience, it distorts it. Talia Mae Bettcher argues that "the traditional wrong body account [...] feeds the very oppression it opposes" (Bettcher 388), so that accounts of transgender end up trapped "in the wrong theory" (Bettcher 404).

While critics often make good points about the wrong body trope's conceptual problems (a strictly binary model of sex, the conflation of body and sex classification) and inadequacies, they also frequently end up in a place of self-contradiction: When Cromwell uses language such as "the body's experience is incongruent with the mind's" (Cromwell 105), he is creating the impression that whatever terminological point of criticism he may achieve in attacking the use of the wrong body trope is undermined by the very terms in which he describes the experiences he strives to name seemingly more accurately. He dismisses the wrong body trope only to get stuck in the same metaphorical field once he moves toward describing gender dysphoria in the terms he perceives to be more accurate. Indeed, Cromwell himself acknowledges that "[a]ttempts to describe this phenomenon, because of the limitations of language, seemingly lead back to the concept of wrong body" (Cromwell 105). As Gayle Salamon notes, the wrong body trope's "phenomenological accuracy has been widely disputed in trans narratives" (Salamon, *Assuming* 19), but when the underlying argument is one of metaphor as inaccurate rhetorical flourish or false consciousness to be done away with in the name of a dream of literalism and 'accuracy,' then this is exactly what my project sets out to complicate. Looking beyond the wrong body to the many other metaphors surrounding dysphoric gender, my project moves the discussion beyond the usefulness or accuracy of a single term to the ways transgender rhetorics negotiate gendered meaning-making more broadly.

Transgender scholar Aren Z. Aizura's work – so far available in several articles – on the persistence of "transsexual travel narratives" focuses on the metaphoric and material (through his ethnographic research in Thailand on transsexual surgery tourism) intersections of transgender and travel. The metaphoric field of "home" and "travel" surrounding transition in particular has received much attention since 1998, the year of the transgender special issue of *GLQ* and the publication of Jay Prosser's and J. Halberstam's first books, all of which discussed spatial metaphors of travel, borders, and home. Aizura's insightful analysis of how the

> transsexual travel narrative imports tropes both from classical Euro-American travel discourse and discourses foregrounding (upward) social mobility as the key to successful reinvention, which are specific to postwar United States culture (Aizura 149).

is a great model for how to critically engage transgender tropes. It differs from my own approach in terms of sources and methods (ethnographic) and it explicitly points to a number of tropes that operate on a smaller scale than an overall transition 'narrative:' "The one-way trip scenario is obviously not the only metaphor used within trans cultural productions to think about or write about gender variance" (Aizura 149). My project analyzes a set of those other metaphors.

Metaphors of gender draw attention from feminist critics not just in transgender contexts. Peter Murphy's collection of "metaphors men live by," for example, critiques the ideological underpinnings of the metaphors of heterosexual masculinity in his community of origin. Murphy explains in reference to the title of his book:

> [A] more precise title for this book might be Analogies, Similes, Synecdoches, Metaphors, Metonymies, Ironies, and Allusions Men (and Women) Live by in the North Country of New York State. That is a long title, to be sure, and nowhere near as poetic as Studs, Tools, and Family Jewels: Metaphors Men Live By (Murphy 8).

This use of metaphor as a master term for symbolic or what is deemed 'non-literal' language[4] is fairly widespread. Technically speaking, not all examples my title lumps in under "metaphors" are metaphors. While I share with Murphy[5] this use of metaphor, our approaches are very different: Murphy's book is a good example of the criticism of certain 'wrong' metaphors as ideology critique with the explicit aim of finding 'better' metaphors. The metaphors he discusses are very different from the ones my project is about – and the political stakes of his feminist analysis of 'male heteronormative' discourse are quite different as well. But even given these differences, it seems to be a rather reductive approach to just read metaphors as bearers of indoctrination and false consciousness without considering their polyvalence. Such theoretical implications, however, are hard to trace in his text in any detail, because Murphy doesn't offer a lot of theoretical work. Rather than focusing on a narrowly-tailored group of examples, Murphy tries to incorporate as many metaphors as possible, at the unfortunate expense of any claim to in-depth discussion:

---

[4] Approaches to metaphor such as Paul Ricoeur's problematize the notion of an essential difference of literal language from metaphor (with the former being granted a special relation to 'truth'): "Everyone agrees in saying that figurative language exists only if one can contrast it with another language that is not figurative. […] What, then, is this other language unmarked from the rhetorical point of view? One must first admit that it cannot be found" (Ricoeur 162).

[5] Murphy and I are in the good company of Americanist Annette Kolodny, who suspected in her seminal first book "that any orthodox grammarian will object that I have not been discussing a metaphor at all" since the grammatical structure she was discussing would formally be labeled a simile (Kolodny 150).

> This book is less about rigorous scholarship and ironclad categories than it is about accessibility to words and phrases, and new ways to look at the discourse of male bonding. Rather than see the book as another contribution to linguistics or to academic cultural studies, it should be seen as a critical, even feminist, glossary (Murphy 4).

My project takes what might be seen as the opposite approach of foregrounding rigorous scholarship and preferring in-depth discussion to a glossary, catch-as-many-as-you-can approach.

Denise Riley's work on linguistic affect presents a more sophisticated idea of language and the severely limited agency that lies in its criticism. For instance, Riley pays close attention to the metaphoricity of self-description: "Entering into a self-description suffers badly from topographical metaphor" (Riley, *Selves* 44). A perspective invested in getting at some essential truth beyond the metaphor might be tempted to affirm such topographical metaphors of depth and surface, inside and outside, self and body in order to base a truth claim about the latter on the view from the former (taking the body 'literally' by claiming the metaphors as literal). This, arguably, is exactly the move Jay Prosser performs in asserting that the wrong body trope is widely used because it is "simply what transsexuality feels like" (Prosser, *Second Skins* 69). Or, as a consequence of Riley's insight, one might be tempted to fight precisely that move by trying to do away with such metaphors – presumably in pursuit of a purer language, one that reflects its own inability to get to any 'body' outside of itself. However, as Paul Ricoeur notes, "it is impossible to talk about metaphor non-metaphorically" (Ricoeur 18). And so, "critical consciousness of the distinction between use and abuse leads not to disuse but to reuse of metaphors" (Ricoeur 299). Analyzing metaphor then does not lead one outside of it. Riley suggests that all one can do in the face of persistent metaphoricity is to try to track it:

> Reprovingly ticking off metaphor is no good, and anyway metaphor will win. This seemingly universal spatial and temporal metaphoricity means that one wants at least to track its obstinate ubiquity, to incorporate these metaphors as natural features, and to not consider them as misleading defects, distortions, or seductions (Riley, *Selves* 48f.).

Riley here outlines one of the basic premises of my project as it sets out to understand transgender metaphors beyond the frequent reprove and outright dismissal by critics calling, as transgender activist and writer Kate Bornstein does, for "new ways of communicating our lives to people who are traditionally gendered" (Bornstein 66). Ultimately, where approaches like Murphy's seem to be out to prove they have outsmarted metaphor, if Riley is right that "metaphor will win," my project considers what we have to learn from metaphors. Rather than focusing on how these metaphors *should be* used or what better ones would be, this dissertation investigates the cultural, rhetorical, and political work of these transgender tropes as they *are* used. Centrally, it locates marginalized forms of knowledge in the persistent metaphors circulating through transgender discourse and turns gender dysphoria from a diagnostic category into a concept called *dysphoric knowledge*.

Gender Dysphoria

Gender Dysphoria emerged as a diagnostic label in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Fisk, "Gender Dysphoria Syndrome" 10). Psychiatrist Norman Fisk, who is credited with introducing the term into the medical literature in the early 1970s, and his colleagues at what was then the "Stanford Gender Identity Clinic," as Sally Hines helpfully summarizes, "argued that this term had greater scope as it could also be applied to individuals who fell outside the traditional defining characteristics of transsexualism" (Hines 12). Transsexualism as a differential diagnosis specifically designed to "identify a person who was not to be confused with a homosexual or a transvestite" (Fisk, "Editorial" 387) had quickly become difficult to police in the reality of clinical encounters, where

> virtually all patients who initially presented for screening provided us with a totally pat psychobiography which seemed almost to be well rehearsed or prepared, particularly in the salients pertaining to differential diagnoses (Fisk, "Editorial" 388).

The original diagnosis was so narrow and heterosexist that those wanting to receive access to medical transition in the 1970s learned what to say to fit the rigid mold. Fisk and his colleagues recognized this, but wanted to hold onto diagnostic authority, so they somewhat "liberalized the indications and requirements for sex conversion surgery" (Fisk, "Editorial" 386) with the introduction of gender dysphoria as the diagnostic term. As such, it has been in circulation ever since. Psychiatrists Betty Steiner, Ray Blanchard, and Kenneth

Zucker write in the introduction to *Gender Dysphoria: Development, Research, Management*, a collection that has been in print in several editions between 1985 and 2012:

> The diagnostic label *gender dysphoric* is much broader than *transsexual*. This term is the only one available to refer to the whole gamut of individuals who, at one time or another, experience sufficient discomfort with their biological sex to form the wish for sex reassignment. […] *Gender dysphoria* refers to the condition: a sense of awkwardness or discomfort in the anatomically congruent gender role and the desire to possess the body of the opposite sex, together with the negative affect associated with these ideas, namely anxiety and reactive depression (Steiner 5f.)

In terms of the most important diagnostic handbook, Gender Dysphoria has mostly had a career as a symptom: It has been used to describe that from which those diagnosed with "Transsexualism" in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III* (1980), or "Gender Identity Disorder" since the 1994 revision of *DSM IV*, "suffer."[6] With the release of the *DSM V* (2013), *Gender Dysphoria* has now made its debut as the overarching diagnostic term.

As this history moving from symptom to diagnosis illustrates, using Gender Dysphoria as a starting point for a critical project might appear controversial. The pathologizing title of Norman Fisk's paper, "Gender Dysphoria Syndrome (the how, what and why of the disease)," is always echoing in the background (Fisk 7). Critics of the negative and pathological resonances of gender dysphoria have countered with the term "gender euphoria," which transvestite/transgender activist Virginia Prince is often credited with coining (Prince). But the term also appears in Elliot's autobiography (Nettick 293) and is taken up by others. It has recently gone from an oppositional, anti-pathologizing term to popping up in psychological literature (e.g. Benestad) as the desired therapeutic outcome of medical and psychological transition, highlighting yet again the ironies of looking for a language that would guarantee oppositionality.

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[6] Kenneth Zucker and Robert Spitzer write: "In the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III; American Psychiatric Association, 1980), there appeared for the first time two psychiatric diagnoses pertaining to gender dysphoria in children, adolescents, and adults: gender identity disorder of childhood (GIDC) and transsexualism (the latter was to be used for adolescents and adults). […] In DSM-IV […] the diagnoses of IDC and transsexualism were collapsed into one overarching diagnosis, gender identity disorder (GID), with different criteria sets for children versus adolescents and adults" (Zucker and Spitzer 32). Zucker and Spitzer set this detailed history of the diagnosis against Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's claim that the *DSM III* diagnostic category of GIDC came about as a direct result of the elimination of homosexuality as mental illness from the DSM and had homophobic implications (Sedgwick, *Tendencies* 154–164). These are not mutually exclusive interpretations. Instead, GIDC must be understood in relationship to both the medical history of "transsexualism" (which predated its inclusion in the DSM by many decades) and to the pathologizing of homosexuality.

While perhaps risky, the echo of pathologization[7] is part of the very appeal and productivity of the term "dysphoric knowledge." In its contested status, Gender Dysphoria (the diagnosis) and gender dysphoria (as the term for an affectively-charged experience) hold a central place around which both medical and Transgender Studies positions articulate themselves. While some psycho-medical approaches seem to use Gender Dysphoria as another term for gender nonconformity (Singh et al. 50), others insist on keeping separate what they describe as a "treatable" condition from "a person's identity" (Coleman et al.). This is precisely the logic behind some of the efforts to replace Gender Identity Disorder with Gender Dysphoria as the diagnostic term: Not the "identity" is marked as a "disorder," but the feelings of dysphoria are deemed a pathological, medicalization-requiring/-authorizing condition, and so one might, for instance, be "in remission" if (no longer) undergoing psycho-/medical treatment or one might never fall under the diagnostic label if cross-gender or genderqueer identified and not experiencing feelings of dysphoria (Bockting and Ehrbar 129).

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[7] Zowie Davy points to this echo, writing: "Psychiatry and sexology has pathologized transpeople with their diagnostic criteria from Inversion, Transvestism, Transsexualism, Gender Dysphoria to Gender Identity Disorder to name a few" (Davy 4).

In Transgender Studies, Julia Serano strongly prefers the term "gender dissonance" for "a sort of gender sadness – a chronic and persistent grief over the fact that I felt so wrong in my body" (Serano 85). This sadness, she argues, is distinct as an "intrinsic matter" from the "extrinsic" emotional stress transsexuals experience in dealing with the public. Serano rejects the term gender dysphoria for purposefully conflating the two (Serano 126). On the contrary, I argue that gender dysphoria (as the root of the neologism dysphoric knowledge) is suggestive precisely because the neat separation between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" that Serano – and many others – would like to posit (implicitly or explicitly) does not seem to hold. Indeed, many of the classic transgender tropes, such as the monster, the mirror, or skin and clothes are precisely negotiations of the layers between, the views on, and the surface and depths of gendered recognition and (self-)perceptions.

Others see gender dysphoria just like the wrong body narrative as "medically constructed and internalized as a means to an end" (Hines 63). Cromwell criticizes gender dysphoria because many transmen have never "felt gender-dysphoric (i.e. disassociated or disconnected from their gender)" (Cromwell 25). It should be noted that Cromwell's explanation of dysphoria sounds rather different from Salamon's pairing of "discomfort and dysphoria" in opposition to "ease and euphoria" (Salamon, *Assuming* 26f.), and so it doesn't always seem clear exactly what people take dysphoria to mean (or whether this is all Greek to them). Ultimately, however, Cromwell takes issue not so much with the term dysphoria as with the use of 'gender,' because instead the "more accurate terms would be body dysphoria or body-part dysphoria" (Cromwell 135). There is, thus, a broad range of bases for proponents of and objectors to the term.

Salamon summarizes Jamison Green's claim "that the internal feeling of dysphoria is central to transsexuals' senses of themselves" and responds by raising concerns about what it means to set dysphoria central to definitions of transgender:

> The implications of basing subjectivity on a feeling of dysphoria are not altogether benign and would seem to construct that subjectivity in absolute negativity, opposed to both bodily morphology and conventional categories of gender (Salamon, *Assuming* 83).

Reading transgender rhetorics in terms of dysphoric knowledge is not meant to suggest that this project is defining transgender subjectivity through gender dysphoria or using dysphoria diagnostically. There is, in fact, no definitional or diagnostic objective in discussing these tropes; there is merely the attempt to give an account of their persistence and work. While many of the ones under discussion in the following chapters do much of their work in terms of dysphoria, this does not mean these are the only transgender tropes or that this is their only possible work.

If one were to argue transgender definitions, then Tobi Hill-Meyer's suggestion seems to offer a convincing way out of having to posit any – dysphoric, euphoric, or otherwise – essence:

> Traditionally defined as a person who doesn't identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, I prefer to shift the focus away from assigned gender and define transgender as a person whose gender is not universally considered valid (Hill-Meyer).

The only claim my project has to make is that these metaphors tell us something about the rhetoric of experience, the dysphoric knowledge emerging at that position of a gender not being universally considered valid, which is not a claim dependent on an essentialist definition of transgender. There are a number of different positions in Transgender Studies on whether gender dysphoria (much like gender in general) is best thought as absolutely internal (e.g. Prosser) or in its intersubjective and social dimensions (e.g. Salamon). The latter is where this project squarely falls, as its situating of the monster trope in chapter II will show, for instance. There are also differing views on the centrality of gender dysphoria to trans experience. But most voices in the field, like Eva Hayward, grant that "agonising experiences of bodily disownment are true and important for some transsexuals" (Hayward, "Lessons" 256), in other words that gender dysphoria is central for some, but also that 'some' does not mean all.

Regardless, then, of where one falls in the disputes about how to theorize such "agonising experiences" or whether to make them the litmus test of transgenderism, they occupy an important place in transgender discourse, often making debates about the trope of the "wrong body" heated. Proposing the term dysphoric knowledge is not meant to define transgender subjectivity through the diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria or through gender dysphoric experience. Rather, claiming this term is motivated by all its messy ambivalence as a contested diagnostic category with stubborn affective and experiential resonances. The "wrong body," moreover, is just one of a number of recurrent metaphors in transgender rhetorics. Rather than disputing the accuracy of any one of these metaphors (an endeavor often premised on naive notions of a better, somehow more referential language yet to be found), it is more useful to think about what they tell us about *dysphoric knowledge*.

Rather than a structure of "feeling" as opposed to "knowledge" (and as if the two could be kept neatly apart), dysphoria in dysphoric knowledge marks a position vis-a-vis taken-for-granted/normative relations between (rhetorics of) gender and embodiment that produces knowledge. Susan Stryker argues that "[t]ransgender studies, through desubjugating previously marginalized forms of knowledge about gendered subjectivity and sexed embodiment, promises […] a radical critical intervention" (Stryker, "(De)Subjugated" 13). This dissertation project argues that some of these marginalized forms of knowledge can be found in the metaphors circulating through transgender discourse. Such knowledge might be called "critical" in that it emerges from the particular location of being at odds with a naturalized sexual binarism whose gender identity attributions most often operate through a silent taken-for-grantedness. Judith Butler agrees with Stryker that critique can emerge precisely from the position of what is not taken for granted:

> One asks about the limits of ways of knowing because one has already run up against a crisis within the epistemological field in which one lives […]. And it is from this condition, the tear in the fabric of our epistemological web, that the practice of critique emerges (Butler, "Critique" 215).

Dysphoric Knowledge

Using Sara Ahmed's language, we might think of dysphoric knowledge as a kind of knowledge of "affect aliens," meaning of "those who are alienated by virtue of how they are affected by the world or how they affect others in the world" (Ahmed, *Promise* 164). To explain what happens in this mode of affective knowing that emerges precisely through being in the world and its frames of knowledge, through being affected by and affecting others in it, we can look to an exemplary passage in genderqueer disability activist Eli Clare's book *Exile and Pride*:

> How did I 'know' I never wanted a husband, would never learn to walk in a skirt? What does it mean when I write that I 'felt' like neither a girl nor a boy? The words *know* and *feel* are slippery in their vagueness. I pull out an old photo of myself from the night of my high school graduation. [...] I look painfully uncomfortable, as if I have no idea what to do with my body, hands clasped awkwardly behind me, shoulders caved inward, immobilized, almost fearful beneath my smile. I am in clumsy, unconsenting drag. This is one of the last times I wore a dress. This is my body's definition of *know* and *feel* (Clare, *Exile & Pride* 158).

Clare here suggests that knowing and feeling are "slippery" terms, but knowledge is produced nonetheless. In one sense, this knowledge is presented as of the body ("my body's definition"), felt through painful discomfort, and manifesting itself on the level of physical posture. In another sense, this knowledge is mediated and received through looking at the photograph. Clare writes that his body has a "definition of *know* and *feel*," but he recollects this affective knowledge – and shows it to the reader – by looking at his photograph. Rather than from the stable ground of a knowing body with direct access to the meaning of this posture and photograph, knowledge here emerges in a moment of recollecting "painfully uncomfortable," dysphoric embodiment – recollecting a moment not of being a knowing, de-contextualized body, but specifically of being a body in the world. Never wanting a husband, never being able to walk in a skirt, and feeling like neither a girl nor a boy become known in (reflecting upon) a moment of failing to *embody* the expectations of high school graduation, its dress, and the attendant conceptions of heteronormative and ableist gender and sexuality in any other than a “clumsy” way. This dysphoric knowledge emerges and becomes rhetorically articulable (for Clare’s reading of his own photograph and for the writing of this scene) through immobilization and fear in the face of “unconsenting drag.”

As Clare’s example suggests, dysphoric knowledge is not a knowledge of (or proper to) a static or diagnostically stable dysphoric “body” or “subject;” rather, it is charged with negative affect and known through narrated experiences of embodiment that lack an authoritative discourse in which to base propositional claims (“how did I ‘know’”?). This knowledge is then also not one that simply “rewrites [Clare’s] disabled body as a strong body that works” (Cowley 86) or one that we can read as “celebrating the disabled body” (Cowley 93) the way that Disability Studies scholar Danielle Cowley reads Clare’s poem “Learning to Speak” (Clare, *Marrow’s* 12). Such a celebratory “counternarrative” (Cowley 86) would necessitate precisely a glossing over, a prideful inhabiting of this dysphoric moment.

This is “one of the last times” Clare wears a dress. As one in a series of prior events, it suggests the iterative, sedimenting experiential character of dysphoric knowledge. “One of the last times” also implies the coming end of this series, suggesting the contribution of dysphoric knowledge to the end of dress wearing. However, it is by no means clear that this moment of looking as if he has “no idea what to do with [his] body” (Clare, *Exile & Pride* 158) immediately leads to an affirmative idea of what to do with it. To stay in the image, the end of dress wearing is not (yet or necessarily ever) the beginning of wearing something else that would suggest firm identitarian ground. Indeed, appearing to have “no idea” what to do with one's body is instead an acute moment of having an idea – or dysphoric knowledge – about gender, sexuality, and ableism, about difference and normativity.

Dysphoric knowledge dwells in the discomfort and un-nameability of marginalized embodied experiences. It offers a term with which to highlight the negative affective charge of some embodied experiences, while distinguishing itself from standpoint epistemologies rooted in pride or shame, and from biomedical and psychological perspectives emphasizing the pathology of dysphoria. In dysphoric knowledge, the affects of exclusion, such as Clare's knowing and feeling discomfort with "clumsy, unconsenting drag," render contingent the felt sense of belonging and coherent group identity based around shared embodiment. Rather than claiming that dysphoria produces privileged knowledge, or that there is a dysphoric subject who knows *qua* its differential being, dysphoric knowledge emerges through negative affect and the repetitions of tropes such as the wrong body, the mirror, and the monster, at the contradictions of narratives of intelligibility. It is situated in rhetorical situations in which one is paradoxically called to speak and bereft of self-referential discourses about intelligible identities that are conventionally granted evidentiary value.

Dysphoric Knowledge and Transgender Rhetorics

Literary scholar David Punter in his volume on *Metaphor* writes that metaphor "can be seen as a kind or way of knowledge." He explains that metaphor is a kind of "bodying-forth of sets of correspondences of which, in some sense, we have all, in specific interpretive communities, been aware in what we might define as a *liminal* way" (Punter 68). Metaphor is the articulation of a liminal kind of knowledge. In connecting transgender rhetorics, and tropes in particular, to dysphoric knowledge, this dissertation lays claim to such a reading of metaphor. In so doing, it builds on other work addressing non-propositional kinds of knowledge.

A particularly useful place to look for an account of other forms of knowledge is philosopher Alexis Shotwell's study *Knowing Otherwise*. Shotwell considers forms of knowledge other than "propositional knowledge:"

> We also know otherwise – we understand things that cannot be or are not spoken, and we may suspect that this form of understanding is important. In this book, I attend to this second form of knowing, which I call 'implicit understanding.' I argue that various forms of knowing otherwise than propositionally are vital to current possibilities for flourishing, expressing dignity, and acting (Shotwell, ix).

Shotwell's take on "sensuous knowledge" is a useful way of framing the questions Eli Clare posits around a knowing and feeling that is described as bodily – and whose words are imprecise. In fact, "being gendered" is one of Shotwell's examples of knowledge that

> is intensely somatic while also complexly social and relational; feeling like a girl, a boy, or some genders we don't have words for involves our corporeal sensorium and also a social uptake of our bodily ways of being in the world. While it might be tempting to think of bodily knowledge as somehow pre-social, pure, or free from enculturation, it is more precise to see how our felt experience of embodiment constellates social worlds with material realities (Shotwell xii).

Shotwell's chapter on race is very much concerned with the level of experience and its rhetorical possibilities, pointing to poetry, and Audre Lorde's poetry in particular:

> Through poetry, what was unexpressed, and perhaps inexpressible, becomes communicable. It functions both as a descriptive tool and as a prescriptive one;

> poetry in Lorde's sense can both articulate what cannot be simply stated and create the conditions for that articulation (Shotwell 28).

Shotwell does not make clear enough – in my view – that it is not poetry in general, but the poetic language of metaphors and tropes in particular, that she resorts to for a language of knowing otherwise. This approach and connection resonates with my project and show the role of metaphor in recent considerations of knowledge.

Shotwell's final chapter is even explicitly concerned with transgender and somatic knowledge. This transgender chapter, however, focuses on the level of politics and collective action, "trans social justice movements" and "political change" (Shotwell 154), which leaves unexplored the implications that she had gestured toward in her earlier chapters of poetic language for "racial and gender formations" that "are to a significant degree inarticulate and potentially inarticulable" (Shotwell xvi). Bringing together dysphoric knowledge and transgender rhetorics, I am connecting two different moments in Shotwell's work. Shotwell –

> interested in the complex of unarticulated beliefs, feelings, habitus, inclinations, attitudes, emotions, first-pass responses, and so on, that underlie and shape racialized, gendered understanding (Shotwell 32) –

focuses more on "commonsense" as importantly formed by sensuous knowledge that "is tacit, nonpropositional, or implicit" (Shotwell 46), while dysphoric knowledge highlights what emerges in the forced articulation of what is sensuously known, but becomes articulated in metaphorical language precisely because it is in violation of "commonsense." Because it makes the kinds of knowledge claims that are supposed to be sensuous and, as Shotwell notes above, "cannot be or are not spoken," it cannot make them as propositions and thus can only emerge as language that is marked as metaphorical.

Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell mentions transgender metaphor and knowledge, but never quite brings the two together in her essay on "Transsexual Women and Feminist Thought." Metaphor here just appears as an inconveniently inadequate way of describing experience:

> Transsexual women reach for one metaphor after another to describe their experience: having a man's body and a woman's body at the same time, or one body emerging from the other, or (most traditionally) being trapped in the wrong body. These figures of speech have aroused scorn from critics (Wilton 2000). Indeed, no metaphor is adequate (Connell 867).

Connell notes that metaphor is never adequate, but that transwomen's experience is not all that different from other people's. In ways that are familiar from how Shotwell characterizes gender as on the level of the sensuous knowledge of what's deemed "commonsense," Connell describes "the moment of knowing that one is a woman despite having a male body" precisely as

> knowledge of a familiar kind: the functional, situated knowledge of gender arrangements, one's place in them, and how to proceed in everyday life that is so well described in feminist microsociology. Other women and men have the same kind of knowledge without the same level of contradiction (Connell 868).

The kind of knowledge that is commonsensical, that would be the subject of microsociological attention to everyday life, because of the "level of contradiction" becomes dysphoric knowledge and produces, seemingly incessantly ("one metaphor after another"), the figures of speech that Connell all finds inadequate. But it is not that these metaphors are inadequate, it is that the rhetorical situation produces this knowledge necessarily as dysphoric and in terms that cannot but be considered inadequate if expected to map out transgender experience in ways that would make it commonsensical and contradiction-free. While coming to be articulated in particular ways and under intensified pressure, Connell insists that such knowledge is "the same kind of knowledge" – it is knowledge about the same gender arrangements and their instantiations in the same everyday life – as that of "other women and men." Connell here points out what A. Finn Enke, too, asks us to consider: "[t]he possibility that transgender studies is about everyone in so far as it offers insights into how and why we all 'do' gender" (Enke 2).

To understand the relationship between this intensified pressure – this particular incitement to speak under which transgender rhetorics emerges – and dysphoric knowledge, we can look to a passage in which Henry Rubin discusses his interviewees:

> What is important is that these transmen are compelled to make these claims. They choose to focus on the differences in order to explain the 'unidentifiable feelings of dis-ease' to themselves. They feel an existential need to make them, and feel that these claims reflect their experienced reality (Rubin, *Self-Made Men* 113).

Rubin makes an argument for taking his interviewee's claims – to being different from women, to certain kinds of masculinity, to their respective embodiments of manhood – seriously by emphasizing their affective intensity: These transmen are "compelled to make these claims" because they "feel an existential need." Rubin is arguing that while readers may think such claims to gendered difference are problematic, essentialist, or trans-ontological, what is important is that his interviewees "feel that these claims reflect their experienced reality." Dysphoric knowledge allows us to think of the ways these men engage in transgender rhetorics a little differently: They may be "compelled to make these claims" by an existential need to explain their feelings and "experienced reality" "to themselves"

– but, much more importantly, they are compelled to explain their gender identification to everyone else, from doctors, lawyers, and databases to family, friends, acquaintances and strangers, from the most bureaucratic to the most personal encounters. These men's discursive positioning means that social and legal recognition of their gender, access to medical transition, to names and pronouns, all rest on these claims and their repetition.

This problem of bringing language and knowledge to any experience, and here to that of gender under the intensified pressures to speak faced by transgender people, is what 'dysphoric knowledge' seeks to describe. Genders whose legitimacy has to be called into existence, whose readability depends on rhetorical production, and whose experiential dimensions have no sanctioned vocabulary are faced with what Denise Riley calls the "affect involved in adopting a self-portrayal" in particularly intensified ways. Riley argues that what she calls "linguistic affect" is not just "some psychological frill pinned onto some sterner stuff of linguistic subjectification:"

> These emotions, these sentiments, do inhere in it. They are not extralinguistic. They are profoundly implicated in the ungainly affair of writing and talking oneself into or out of a social category. They are, indeed, rhetorical – but, exactly as such, they are very far from trivial or residual (Riley, *The Words of Selves* 35).

It is this take on rhetoric and affect – and the non-triviality of transgender rhetoric in particular – that my project takes its starting point from to argue that these transgender tropes persist, because they do a certain work, because they tell us something, because they make metaphorical knowledge claims.

(a word on) Method

> More precisely, justification as an epistemological imperative runs through each of these examples, and I want to suggest that it might be central to understanding

> how and where queerness and method might intersect. If knowledge is justified belief, what processes of justification do considerations of queerness undergo to become knowledge, and what kind of knowledge is this? (Salamon, "Queer Method" 226)

Gayle Salamon in her 2009 "musing" in *Hypatia* makes two points about queerness, method, and justification that are worth bearing in mind in sketching this project. The first point is that there is an epistemological imperative that is put on how and where queerness and method intersect, and that this imperative takes precisely the form of a pressure to justify – and she offers a series of particularly frustrating examples of rigged processes of justification. If this is so, then it seems to me that in constructing any queer (in terms of sexuality or gender, see below) project, one would do well a) to remember that a certain precarious relation to method and justification may come with the territory and b) to keep an eye on the processes of justification and their effect on the knowledge that gets produced in response and relation to them. However, rather than merely conceding a conflict between queer projects and justification (and thus giving up on claims to method), Salamon, secondly, launches a justification of her work in queer (theory and) phenomenology by way of a different imperative:

> I would suggest more broadly that queerness always carries with it a kind of philosophical imperative. As Judith Butler notes in the first few lines of "Imitation and Gender Insubordination", there is something inevitably philosophical happening when we ruminate on the "being" of being queer, and I would venture the universal to claim that anyone who is, has. This is no less true for queer gender than for queer sexuality (Salamon, "Queer Method" 227).

Salamon's insistence on queerness as a philosophical mode in the face of its failure as philosophy proper according to certain processes of justification is quite suggestive for thinking about dysphoric knowledge and the imperatives of its rhetorical production – and, in turn, my attempt at its academic (re-)production.

Rather than taking a 'too queer for methods' approach in the face of the abuse of method as a gatekeeper term of academic conventionality, Salamon's concerns about knowledge actually line up closely with what Michael Elliott and Claudia Stokes have outlined in their methodological reader as precisely the point of *method*:

> The word itself comes from the Greek roots 'meta' (after) and 'hodos' (a way). Method literally means the path that one takes as a scholar; it encompasses those things necessary for producing knowledge, the tools one uses to proceed on 'the way after' scholarship (Elliott and Stokes 2).

Elliott and Stokes, introducing a collection of literary criticism that focuses on "the strategies and assumptions that allow the critic to handle and interpret [...] information", through interdisciplinary practices that – contrary to traditional disciplinary method – "often call into question the centrality of a literary text" through the use of nonliterary material and/or a focus on "a larger social critique" (Elliott and Stokes 3f.).

My method will be reading in the sense of just such an interpretive endeavor. While specificities of different media (literature or film) need to be respected and at times give rise to calling the practice of interpreting them something else, I think there is no problem with referring to a range of meaning-bearers as *texts* and to *reading* as what we do with them. To follow Elliott's and Stokes' example a little further, let me lay out the strategies and assumptions guiding the selection and handling of materials and information:

Since the starting point of this project is the ubiquity of these tropes, it cannot be its goal to catalogue every instance of their appearance. Rather than attempting the impossible task of a comprehensive collection, this project aims at an argument developed in conversation with some[8] examples. Tracing these metaphors in and across literary, autobiographical, academic, and other forms, I will discuss examples that allow me to demonstrate some of the versatility of these tropes – the monster, for instance, is a figure with transphobic and trans-identificatory uses – and that offer the most fodder for analysis from the vantage point of dysphoric knowledge. In other words, I will tackle some of the particularly common and some of the less uncommon, both because of their theoretical significance. In fact, these tropes have theoretical significance in much larger histories of (Western) thought: The monster is a figure negotiating the relationship between deviant embodiment and social belonging, the mirror as a trope of reflection and epistemology, the ghost as a figure of temporality, loss, and splitting, skin and clothes as layers of contesting depths and surfaces of identity. So, the point is not to mark these tropes as trans-specific, but to analyze their specific and ubiquitous transgender uses.

Tracking some of the more familiar and persistent tropes in some of the near-canonical materials makes sense given their (sub-)cultural importance and centrality to a maturing field, but it will be supplemented by more original examples and metaphors (such as transgender uses of the vagina in the *Vagina*

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[8] My use of *some* harkens back to the section on "Someness" in J. Halberstam's and I. Livingston's introduction to *Posthuman Bodies*: "How many races, genders, sexualities are there? Some. How many are you? Some. 'Some' is not an indefinite number awaiting a more accurate measurement, but a rigorous theoretical mandate whose specification, necessary as it is (since the multiple must be made), is neither numerable nor, in the common sense, innumerable" (Halberstam and Livingston 9).

Monologues and transgender references to the figure of *Peter Pan* in chapter V) to be attentive to their ever evolving and context-specific work. Because the metaphoric fields outlined in the chapters below have, as Sally Hines pointed out with regard to the wrong body trope (see above), served as lenses through which key conflicts and issues in Transgender Studies are contested, the explicit focus on them offers an opportunity to re-think the field.

While these metaphors have longer (sometimes – like the mirror – ancient) histories, my project is focused on their explicit use in relation to transgender phenomena. This includes transgender phenomena somewhat *avant la lettre* or under different or more specific sexological/diagnostic/identificatory categories (e.g. invert, transsexual), but nevertheless means the project's main period is the 20th & early 21st century. A text like *Frankenstein*, which would seem to fall outside of this historical location, is part of its scope because and insofar as it is the vehicle of metaphors that have been/are taken up in this historical context – and will thus be read from a perspective that is decidedly distant from its original frame. Interpreting these metaphors to some degree necessitates tracking them back, but only for the purpose of understanding the history of a somewhat expanded present. Queer literary theorist Kathryn Bond Stockton writes about reading texts in the synchronic frame of the present:

> [A]ll these texts and their ideas still exist to be read. To read this way does not put a stop to the pleasure of hunts for diachronic patterns, sequence, influence, contexts, or authorial circumstance - I will participate in these enjoyments - it just restores these hunts to their place in the textual spread before us, at this current moment, which allows us tremendous 'latitude' for how we arrange our fictions in our heads, going back and forth between them and among them, whether or not anyone 'lets' us, in some official sense (Stockton, *Queer Child* 51f.).

In the corpus of my project, for example, transgender Frankenstein (doctor and/or monster) metaphorizations sometimes play off of the James Whale films, sometimes off of the novel, sometimes off of the amalgamation of these figures and storylines in popular culture, but they always do so from 'the current moment' as Stockton puts it (as time marches on, the 'current moment' is occasionally - as for Janice Raymond, for instance - the late 1970s). In other words, as I have been prompted to say by questions from friendly colleagues in the English department, this is not a dissertation in Romanticism, and reading *Frankenstein* does not make it one.

Alexis Shotwell writes that

> [i]f there are scarce metaphors and thick stories for white trans people with some money or class privilege, there are even fewer models and discursive communities for reflecting on how racialized trans people's specific experience is framed or understood and what metaphors are available to them (Shotwell 153f.).

In discussing the work of metaphors based on examples that largely (but not exclusively) appear to fall into the racial and socioeconomic category Shotwell mentions, it is important to stay mindful of the complex interplay of transgender rhetorics with racialization (the stakes of reworking monstrosity may be different depending on one's racial privilege or lack thereof) and other categories of difference. However, blanket statements about the "availability" of metaphors or transgender hormones, surgeries, and body modifications to any racialized group are prone to perpetuating the structures they set out to criticize. It is, after all, not useful to simplify matters by pretending that race and class map perfectly onto each other, or to overlook the reality of hormonal and surgical bodily modification in the lives of a wide range of people – even if that reality is one of so-called “black-market” hormones, surgery fundraisers, or sex work. The heated controversies[9] about Venus Xtravaganza’s interview statements and presentation by Jennie Livingston in the 1990 documentary *Paris Is Burning* are a testament to both those complex realities and an academic inability to account for them, their metaphors, and fantasies. Transgender canons and discourses have, of course, not emerged in a vacuum and are thus frequently saturated with white privilege or its histories, but pointing this out does not – and should not – require us to simplify to the point of discounting the presence of and importance of, for instance, Zachary Nataf for mid-1990s FTM visibility (Prosser, *Second Skins* 230) and debate (Nataf) or ignoring the more recent work by and about black FTMs such as Kortney Ryan Ziegler’s documentary *Still Black* and Asher Kolieboi’s audio-visual project *(Un)heard*.[10]

Interdisciplinary Locations

> Transgender Studies, far from being an inconsequentially narrow specialization dealing only with a rarefied population of transgender individuals, or with an eclectic collection of esoteric transgender practices, represents a significant and ongoing critical engagement with some of the most trenchant issues in contemporary humanities, social science, and biomedical research (Stryker, “(De)Subjugated” 3f.).

In both its main affiliations and its contributions, this project is situated in the fields and/or fields-turned-disciplines of (Trans-)Gender Studies, American Studies, and Rhetoric. As such, the project takes Susan Stryker’s claim of the relevancy of Transgender Studies not just as a defensive and reassuring move against charges of inconsequentiality, but as a formulation of an ideal – critically engaging trenchant issues in an interdisciplinary context. More than as evidence of “relevance” (which is a seal of academic justification that seems to be handed out or withheld as a token of political approval more than anything), this ideal is worth pursuing for the transformative impact it has on our projects themselves. In other words, it may make this project more relevant that it is situated in a discursive space between certain fields and disciplines, but what is more interesting is the influence of this location on the project.

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[9] V. Xtravaganza’s wish “to find a man and have a house in the suburbs with a washing machine” and “I would like to be a spoiled rich white girl. They get what they want, whenever they want it” served as fodder for a number of critical positions in the 1990s (Butler, *Bodies*; hooks; Namaste, *Sex Change*; Namaste, *Invisible Lives*; Prosser, *Second Skins*; Halberstam and Livingston). Including even seemingly far-fetched places such as a book on fur (Emberley).

[10] Cf. http://stillblackfilm.org/ and http://transunheard.com/

Nael Bhanji has suggested that transgender and area studies are often cast in opposition:

> Cast as a specific kind of knowledge that can only exist in opposition to ‘area studies,’ transgender and transsexual Euro-American academia has often resorted to comparative frameworks that naturalize and reproduce nationalist discourses of sexuality through fetishizing gestures that map racial difference as spectacle (Bhanji 171).

I am weary of the use of comparative frameworks that Bhanji describes and skeptical of the claims to a universalist idea of transgender studies that often undergirds its knowledge production. Locating this project in American Studies is the antidote to such dangers. Specificity and cultural location are crucial - all the more obviously so when dealing with a set of metaphors. The sources and contexts for this project, as well as my training, are in American Studies, and that placement is not threatened by the occasional conflict with the idea of national literatures: At least since the days of Leo Marx writing about *The Tempest* (Marx), there has been a place for considering influential British texts in American Studies - and the focus on Frankenstein as a racialized metaphor in the

U.S. in Elizabeth Young's *Black Frankenstein* confirms the (inter-)disciplinary validity of such an approach. Young makes a strong case for recognizing Frankenstein's "transatlantic orbit" and its specific role and importance in U.S. imagination – not least evidenced by the imprint of its various Hollywood film versions on popular culture (Young). And so, while some of the texts would, in terms of national literatures, be classified as of British origin, they have a place in this study: Their enduring reception, popularity, and appropriation in U.S. culture make especially apparent the limits of a concept such as 'national literature'. It is in this spirit that my American Studies project turns to sources such as *Frankenstein* and *The Well of Loneliness* to understand their role in transgender discourse. Placed in this particular disciplinary location, this project is in the good company of such work as Trystan Cotten's edited collection *Transgender Migrations* (Cotten, *Transgender Migrations*), which appeared in Routledge's "New Directions in American History" series.

Even though one of the inspirations for this project was a certain dissatisfaction with cultural, (trans)gender, and queer studies approaches that use the term 'Rhetoric' nebulously and without much concern for its histories, various meanings (which is arguably one of the reasons the plural "Rhetorics" makes sense), tools, methods, or use(s) [at Cornell University's 2009 "TransRhetorics" conference, 'Rhetoric' was not talked about much at all], this project itself engages Rhetoric more in the sense of engaging multidisciplinary studies of metaphor (and approaches to discourse) than in the current organizational sense of Rhetoric and Composition. This is more a result of a certain gap than an unwillingness on my part: While the intersection of cultural and rhetorical studies should, indeed, be extremely busy given the wide use of the term Rhetoric, this has often left the disciplinary formation claiming the term untouched.[11] Feminist Rhetoric's preoccupation with adding women rhetors to the canon, unproblematized speaking (female) bodies, or – in response – explaining poststructuralist feminism to the field (Buchanan and Ryan; Schell and Rawson) makes it largely unresponsive to questions of Rhetorics beyond the level of individual speakers and to questions of gender as it is rhetorical not as it speaks (for) itself. Even K. J. Rawson's attempt at a transgender critique of Rhetoric only goes so far as to challenge "gender normativity" and bring "more expansive definitions of gender" to the field (Rawson 41f.). It is my hope that in engaging Rhetoric from the cultural studies side, I can bring together a discourse analytic sense of the larger setting and a larger landscape of power in which speech acts happen with a rhetorical attention to what is being said in each instance as an expression of more than ventriloquism of, for example, medical discourse. While it would be theoretically naïve to think of transgender rhetorics as individuals speaking their truth, I think reducing these rhetorical moments to repetitions of some larger ideological formation is arrogant (where, after all, does the almighty critic's insightful agency come from?) and boring, because it overlooks the ways in which even within the limits of what can be said, the larger discourses' own contradictions generate *other* speaking positions and *other* claims that are meaningful and important.

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[11] See Rosteck for an attempt to make the connection more explicit and more fruitful (Rosteck).

Chapter Roadmap

Chapter II, *Monsters & Doctors*, discusses how the Frankenstein figure has been circulating through texts about transsexuality and transgender – from transphobic uses of the monster to transgender reclaimings of the monster's eloquent revolt. Using psychologist Silvan Tomkins' conceptualization of shame, the chapter offers a reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in terms of the monster as a figure of self-narration and of failed sociality grounded in embodiment. I argue that questioning the reactions of disgust to the monster's body that defines the body itself as 'disgusting' through a Tomkinsian lens has important implications for critiquing how transphobia becomes naturalized. Together, the negative affects in the novel illuminate the transgender monster metaphor as one that negotiates non-normative embodiment and its perceptions – a trope that metaphorizes the emergence of affect aliens as they affect and are affected by the social world.

Chapter III, *Splitting Figures: Mirrors & Ghosts*, looks to mirrors and ghosts as tropes of splitting and doubling. Analyzing competing interpretations of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* in Transgender, Lesbian, and Queer Studies and their focus on a pivotal mirror scene in the novel, I formulate a transgender take on debates about queer affect that foregrounds gender dysphoria and problematizes the dominance of pride and shame as mutually exclusive starting points for politics. Transgender mirrors stage scenes of experiences of gender that find no reflection in mirror models of knowledge or Lacanian accounts of subject formation. From seeing and reflection as models of truth that fail transgender embodiment, the chapter turns to disrupted temporal and pronominal narrative coherence, historical loss, and (auto-)biographical disembodiment figured in (mourning or epistemologically privileging) ghosts that haunt transgender memoirists whose claims to gender are split from the available language of gendered truth claims.

Chapter IV, *Skin & Clothes*, discusses the skin suits of violent transsexual movie tropes (*The Skin I Live In*, *Silence of the Lambs*) and the cloth skins of a transgender novel (Leslie Feinberg's *Stonebutch Blues*) to bring out the different logics of skin and clothing as rhetorically gender-identity-laden surfaces and their different places in the production of dysphoric knowledge. Drawing on Barbara Johnson and Roman Jakobson, the chapter distinguishes the tropes of clothing and skin in their relationship to gender and sex: Clothing operates according to a metaphorical logic, while skin operates metonymically – in turn allowing for epistemological claims for the one, and ontological claims for the other. Because transgender cannot operate through a metonymical model of sex as gender, such gender claims cannot but follow a metaphorical logic.

If transgender rhetorics necessarily produce gender rhetorically under intensified pressure because the ways gender is attributed and supposed to be known cannot sustain transgender claims and if, as Beth Elliott notes, the language used makes trans people "easy targets" (see above) for feminist criticism, because it is forced to articulate the gendered belonging otherwise taken for granted and invisibilized as commonsensical, then what does this mean for the place of transgender rhetorics in feminism? Can it only be an object, a prism that breaks the light of gender so that it can be seen and critiqued more clearly, or does it open the possibility of transgender feminist subjects? With these questions, chapter V., *Feminist Subjects: Peter Pan & the (Neo-)Vagina Monologues*, turns from tropes that can generally be found across the transgender spectrum to those that are used in gender-specific – transmasculine and transfeminine – ways. Inscribing transgender into the gender binary, examples such as that of *Peter Pan* and the figure of the transgender "boi"/boy and of transgender women performing and re-writing Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* negotiate the place of transmasculinity and transfemininity in feminism. While some feminist perspectives appear to suggest that transgender claims to gender are irreconcilable with feminism, many of those re-casting their place in the gendered order of things use these precisely as a platform for speaking as feminists (e.g. in the language of *The Vagina Monologues* or of alternative boi masculinities) and articulating transfeminist positions.

In the coda, I conclude that dysphoric knowledge emerges both in response to gender dysphoric experience in the world that has recourse only to language deemed metaphorical and as a linguistic affect generated by the rhetorical response and the incitement to speak itself.

II. Monsters & Doctors

> I will say this as bluntly as I know how: I am a transsexual, and therefore I am a monster (Stryker, "My Words" 246).

Beginning my study with the monster, and with *Frankenstein* in particular, might seem like a canonical gesture. Literary scholar Audrey Fisch writes in her book on Frankenstein as cultural icon:

> The range of the different conversations about *Frankenstein* is a testament to the elasticity of the novel – and perhaps of academic discourse – and to *Frankenstein*'s current status as an iconic text in literary studies. *Frankenstein* is now one of a small number of literary texts that every critic feels compelled to take on (Fisch 215).

In this view, a transgender reading of *Frankenstein* falls within the "elasticity of the novel" and might just be another round of critics feeling compelled to take on this iconic text. Fisch traces the proliferation of scholarly readings of *Frankenstein* to its feminist canonization in the 1970s (Fisch 202). These feminist readings interpreted the Creature

> as a representation of the dynamics of female storytelling, childbirth and parenting, and sexuality. Established as a suitable subject for academic inquiry, the text of *Frankenstein* has since been read by literary critics, as I describe, as a symbol of, among other things, female individualism, the alienated worker, the repressed homosexual, or the African slave (Fisch 8).

However, its place in the literary canon, and in feminist literary scholarship in particular (Young 9), is not what makes *Frankenstein* interesting to Transgender Studies – and to this project. Instead, this chapter focuses on metaphorizations of Frankenstein such as the one in this chapter's epigraph by Susan Stryker. The objective is not to make transgender appear in the novel, rather it is to explain the work of Frankenstein's appearances in reference to transgender.

Elizabeth Young notes that the Frankenstein metaphor is protean, but "does have particularly significant forms" (Young 4) and footnotes transgender monster metaphors as another such example (and one she does not focus on) in her study of *Black Frankenstein* (Young 17; 239 Fn. 55). Indeed, Mary Shelley's nameless creature,[12] who has circulated under the name of his scientist-creator "Frankenstein" since "as early as the 1830s" (Young 3), is often the metaphor of choice when transgender people are cast as "monstrous, crazy, or less than human" (Rubin, *Self-Made Men* 12) or doctors are criticized as misguided patriarchal megalomaniacs (Daly; Raymond). Perhaps even more frequently, the monster appears in transgender autobiographical narratives, from Leslie Feinberg's early journal (D. Feinberg 10) via Susan Stryker's seminal piece "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix" to Chaz Bono's recent autobiography (Bono 12, 162). This chapter will address what about the monster and his "infinitely interpretable body" (Halberstam, *Skin Shows* 21) makes him such an extraordinarily persistent metaphor for transgender – and what this trope has to tell us about transphobia and dysphoric knowledge.

Queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman argues that *Frankenstein* makes visible "the conflict between rational and emotional understanding," suggesting that the novel "offers us figures for witnessing the history of a discredited form of knowledge and for tracking its afterlife" (Freeman 95f.). While Freeman focuses on sensory modes of perceiving history, she offers a starting point to think about *Frankenstein* as offering transgender metaphorizations a figure for witnessing discredited, dysphoric knowledge. She reads the monster's body as intensely historical (as opposed to concepts of the body as an ahistorical lump of pre-discursive flesh):

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[12] In the novel, he is most often called the "Creature" (and, at times, "fiend") and he comes with masculine pronouns. Frankenstein calls him a "monster" a few times and sometimes the Creature refers to himself as such: "Was I then a monster?"(M. W. Shelley 81). It is very common to refer to him just as "the monster." – I will use these terms interchangeably.

> Frankenstein's monster, by contrast, is a body that contains a history of bodies and of bodiliness and thus figures a gender and a sexuality that themselves write a history of genders and sexualities. After Foucault, the monster suggests, we are all Frankensteinian monsters: or, after *Frankenstein*, the Foucauldian body emerges (Freeman 103).

Frankenstein's monster, in Freeman's estimation, can be taken as a metaphor of a Foucauldian understanding of the body – a genealogical body. While Freeman is very much concerned with *Frankenstein* as a model for how to think history, her readings of the monster's body are instructive for the way they emphasize the historicity and contingency of genders and sexualities. This dimension is, as we will see, central to the way the monster figures in relation to transgender, and most prominently so in relation to the transsexual body because of its comparatively short history and thus obvious historicity.

In the *Abnormal* lectures, Foucault uses the "hermaphrodite" as a figure that allows him to mark a change in the idea of monstrosity, the beginning of the disappearance of the figure of the monster and the advent of the abnormal individual:

> The new figure of the monster, which appears at the end of the eighteenth century and is at work at the start of the nineteenth century, is elaborated, or begins to be elaborated, around the question of hermaphrodites (Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France 1974-1975* 66f.).

If we posit that the original "hermaphrodite" was, in all their monstrous unintelligibility then, and biomedically reshuffled categorical unintelligibility now (differential diagnosis, as the history of the DSM shows, is challenging even for the most diagnostically minded), a figure mixing not just "male and female," but thereby precisely all possible dimensions of gendering and sexuality (and thus is a name that in some moments of time organizes knowledge around what today carries names such as trans and intersex), then it may be too simple to make "hermaphrodites" the blueprint of a development from somatically monstrous first to morally monstrous conduct later. While Foucault's tracing of this development is convincing for the court cases regarding partnering and sexual conduct that he discusses, when generalized, it emphasizes only those aspects of the historical "hermaphrodite" that turn into "the homosexual," while other aspects of gender diversity and sexed embodiment with their own psycho-medical histories disappear from view. In short, if the "hermaphrodite" is a figure whose historicity reflects shifts in concepts of monstrosity, we may well want to read this figure as including what have since, over the course of that very history and its shifts, come to be known and come to emerge as, trans phenomena. So, when Freeman writes that Frankenstein's monster "contains a history of bodies and of bodiliness," we can read that to mean that this monster contains a history of trans embodiment, but also that having a body with an obvious history (of surgery, for instance) is always in some ways a sign of monstrosity. Despite its recent specific emergence, then, transgender has been part of monstrosity's history and historicity for much longer.

Discussing the monster's body as a figure historicizing gender, Freeman argues that *Frankenstein* is about the relationship "between historical understanding and the male body" (Freeman 99). Others have made a similar point in thinking specifically about the relationship between transgender and Frankenstein's monster figure. Marjorie Garber, for instance, dedicates a short passage in *Vested Interests* to mentioning that "Frankenstein [...] can [...] be read as an uncanny anticipation of transsexual surgery and, perhaps, specifically female-to-male transsexual surgery" (Garber 111). She suggests that Frankenstein would appeal particularly to discussions of FTMs, because the monster is a man-made *man* in the novel. However, what is in question in the novel is the monster's authenticity as a hu*man*. This resonates with conflicts about ideas of authenticity surrounding transgender claims to gender and the 'man-made' surgically modified body. It is then not the making of a 'male body' that is at stake in this metaphorization, but the question of origins and authenticity. In other words, it is all about the man-made and not so much about the *man*. Indeed, neither Garber in her subsequent paragraph, nor the historical record support the idea that the monster has been taken up specifically by or against FTMs or people on the transmasculine spectrum. On the contrary, transgender women were the focus of early anti-trans appropriations and re-metaphorizations of Doctor Frankenstein and his monster, just as it was trans women like Sandy Stone[13] and Susan Stryker who first spoke back. As Susan Stryker puts it: "Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment" (Stryker, "My Words" 245). It is really only with their increasing visibility in transgender activism and the discussion at large in the 1990s (Wickman 46) that trans men more prominently enter the realm of Frankenstein metaphorics. The monster is evidently not to be counted among the gender-specific metaphors that will be the focus of chapter V.

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[13] Allucquère Rosanne (Sandy) Stone responded to Raymond in 1987 when she wrote the first version of her classic essay "The 'Empire' Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto." Stone had been a targeted by name/example in Raymond's chapter denigrating transsexual women in lesbian feminist communities, because she had lived and worked with the radical feminist music collective Olivia Records in the mid- to late 1970s (Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto").

These various appearances of Frankensteinian monster metaphorics in texts about transgender present, implicitly and/or explicitly and at varying lengths, readings of the novel: In transferring meaning from Shelley's monster, they put forth a certain understanding of the interpretive possibilities of this monster. This is, however, not a one-way operation from *Frankenstein* to discursive constructions of transgender. Paul Ricoeur writes about metaphor that "in metaphorical attribution, the subsidiary subject is modified just as much as the principal subject to which it is being applied" (Ricoeur 113). The metaphoric pairing of Frankenstein and transgenderism is no exception. Ideas about transsexuality have entered readings of *Frankenstein* – even mainstream, otherwise not transgender-related ones – just as the doctor/monster metaphorics populate accounts of transgenderism. Peter Brooks writes that Shelley's monster has taken "a permanent place in our imaginary" (Brooks 220), and so, apparently, has seeing him as a transsexual. Consider Brooks' need to discuss what the monster might have in his pants and why "we" as readers might not know for sure:

> The novel never for a moment suggests that the Monster is anything but a male, and both Frankenstein and his creature assume that he is sexually functional as a male (there would otherwise be no need for Frankenstein to destroy the female monster). Yet the Monster never is given the chance to function sexually, and we are never given a glimpse of those parts of the body that would assure us that he is male. Of course we aren't: such is not part of the discourse of the novel (setting aside pornography) at the time (Brooks 219).

All of this, of course, would be equally true of Victor Frankenstein himself, or of any other character in the novel. The particular appearance of their genitals is anybody's guess, yet goes unquestioned (as does, in Brooks' attempt at grounding the monster's maleness in "sexual functioning," the link between genitalia, procreativity, and gender). None of the characters have a "chance to function sexually": Even the wedding night is merely the night the monster kills Frankenstein's newlywed wife.[14] Seeing the monster as a figure "which eludes gender definition," this absence of explicit descriptions of "those parts of the body" suddenly becomes cause for Brooks' concern (Brooks 219). Brooks here 'reads' the monster very much as he would 'read' a transsexual, where "being read" is the opposite of passing (Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" 354). He has very specific suspicions – fixated on genitals – which, as he himself notes so aptly in the quote, are without textual basis in the novel. The point is not that Brooks puts forth a full-fledged transgender reading of *Frankenstein*, but that his (problematic) ideas about transsexuality and about the relationship between genitals and gender attribution, appear to inform his reading of Shelley's novel – and of Shelley's monster in particular. The metaphoric connection has so strongly been established that it comes as a surprise when Marjorie Garber writes that "the association of the Frankenstein story with transsexualism is not as far-fetched as it may at first appear" (Garber 111). Rather than being far-fetched, this association is so commonplace that a literary critic like Brooks cannot help but see the transsexual in the monster.

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[14] In the space of the thwarted or silent heterosexual encounters, the monster's threat to be with Victor on his wedding night has given rise to interesting queer readings, starting with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reference to Frankenstein in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 163).

In what is to follow, I will discuss how Frankenstein and his creature, doctor and monster, have been circulating through a variety of texts about transsexuality and transgender ranging from transphobic to transgender activist ones. The monster, as it appears in transgender discourse, carries with it the knowledge – felt acutely in moments of gender dysphoria – of narrow definitions of properly gendered embodiment, the violence of ideas of sexed authenticity, and the naturalization of social exclusion. Against this backdrop, I will ask what we can learn about the novel's transgender mobilizations from reading the eloquent monster as a figure of failed sociality grounded in embodiment. As part of that reading of *Frankenstein*, I will apply Silvan Tomkins' conceptualization of negative affects to the monster's emerging novelistic self and thereby sketch an alternative to James Hatch's emphasis on the monster as inherently disgusting. I will argue that reading shame and disgust surrounding the monster's body in *Frankenstein* for parallels to transgender experience has important implications for how we theorize transphobia and gender dysphoria.

The Transphobic Monster

The two authors who are perhaps most notorious for their very strong feminist-separatist anti-transgender uses of Frankenstein tropes are Mary Daly and Janice Raymond. Daly addresses transsexuality in a short chapter she calls "Boundary Violation and the Frankenstein Phenomenon" (Daly 69), while Raymond focuses her entire book *The Transsexual Empire* on transsexuality.

Both these works[15] originally appeared in the late 1970s and were republished in the early 1990s with new prefaces that added something, but took nothing back. While they may still stand for a certain type of position,[16] Daly's and Raymond's texts are certainly not good places to look for the current state of trans-feminist relations and debates, and I do not mean to suggest otherwise. What interests me about these "classics" is their paradigmatic use of Frankenstein metaphorics.

According to Patricia Elliot, a discussion of contested sites between Transgender, Queer, and Feminist Theory to this day requires one

> to avoid assimilating, idealizing or denigrating the forms of transition or body modification taken up by trans subjects; to accept the process of changing sex or gender without responding defensively to it, *without projecting the monstrous on it*, without dividing some forms from others in a hierarchy of worthiness (Elliot 11) [My emphasis; AKR].

Projecting the monstrous is surely part of the legacy of Daly and Raymond and thus going back to these sources remains important for a discussion of associations between transgender and monstrosity. Mary Daly draws on *Frankenstein* very directly:

> Mary Shelley displayed prophetic insight when she wrote *Frankenstein*, foretelling the technological fathers' fusion of male mother-miming and necrophilia in a boundary violation that ultimately points toward the total elimination of women. Her main character, Doctor Frankenstein, expressed a bizarre necrophilic 'maternal instinct' in making the monster […] Transsexualism is an example of male surgical siring which invades the female world with substitutes (Daly 70f.).

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[15] Insofar as I am treating Daly's and Raymond's positions as interchangeable here, I am only following Daly's lead: "[Raymond's] work has been so intertwined with my own for so long that it has often been impossible to tell whose ideas are whose" (Daly 1).

[16] For instance, Gayle Salamon finds the transsexual monster in Elizabeth Grosz' 1994 book *Volatile Bodies*: "The intersexual and the transsexual again function as phantoms in the text, both standing in for – and excluded from the text on the grounds of – the *monstrous impossibility* [my emphasis; AKR] of any subject position in between or outside any 'proper' sex, rendered unlivable by their lack of footing in the subject-producing matrix of sexual difference" (Salamon, *Assuming* 152). And outside of the sphere of academic publications, one can find plenty of blog posts posted in the 2010s that "*do* think Janice Raymond was right" (rancom).

Similar to Daly, Raymond extends her criticism of medical professionals, of the Dr. Frankensteins of trans surgery, to transsexuals. While she invokes *Frankenstein* less directly in her original text, there is still quite a loud echo of Victor Frankenstein's fascination with alchemy in Raymond's assertion that "contemporary transsexual treatment is a modern version of medieval, androgynous alchemy" (Raymond 154f.). Alchemy serves two functions here: Moving transsexual treatment into a Frankensteinian realm of monstrosity and scientific hubris and putting the sexual binary on the level of chemical elements like gold, unchangeable essences that cannot be 'made,' no matter how hard alchemists might try. Associated with early, discredited models of pre-scientific knowledge, transsexuals are then also characterized as made of "synthetic parts" and headed for "future demise" (Raymond 165). Creating the image of transsexuals as failed, death-bound medical experiments, Raymond alludes to Frankenstein imagery at least as much as Daly's formulation of trans women as "dead matter molded into life-like imitations of women" (Daly 72).

In her 1994 preface, Raymond revisits the question of monsters explicitly, writing that she "never meant that transsexualism was the result of male medical monsters or biomedical conspiracies" (Raymond xxii). That Raymond would bother to insist that she never claimed *doctors* were monsters is most interesting because of what it does not directly address. While there are "ghoulish gynecologists," "sons of Frankenstein" (Daly 72) in Daly's book, Raymond's critique of transsexuals as "synthetic products" of the "medical empire" (Raymond 12, 165) keeps monster and doctor on two separate sides of the coin. While doctors in her metaphor have only ever been Victor Frankenstein figures, transsexuals are rendered as monsters. And so her disclaimer in the new preface speaks most loudly where it is silent. She never meant to accuse doctors of being "male medical monsters," but what about transsexual monsters? Stopping short of directly saying 'transsexuals are monsters,' she nevertheless manages to affirm this position couched in the seemingly mollifying language of "respect and dignity:"

> Certainly, male-to-constructed female transsexuals are entitled to the same humanity, the same respect and dignity, as is every other member of the human race – but as male human beings, or as individuals who have undergone transsexual procedures, not as women (Raymond xxiv).

To grant someone the status of a "member of the human race" is, of course, in its very gesture to withhold unquestionable membership in the category of the human. If Raymond can grant ("certainly"), qualify, or limit it, then such a status as member of the human race is not much of an entitlement – or it is an entitlement rather than a taken-for-granted state of categorical belonging, because it must be sought and granted. This boundary work "between humanness and monstrosity" (Halberstam, *Skin Shows* 37) is precisely that of the never-quite-human monster. As Halberstam writes, in Shelley's novel "the monster is not human because he lacks the proper body" (Halberstam, *Skin Shows* 35). Lacking the proper, i.e. the "female," body is what for Raymond makes transsexual humanness assailable.

It is easy to see why Raymond's and Daly's views are frequently referenced in Transgender Studies as particularly transphobic examples. Nikki Sullivan, for instance, calls Raymond's and Daly's "incredibly vitriolic outpourings" a kind of "(metaphoric) violence" (Sullivan 557). This violence is not just "(metaphoric)" because it is not physical violence (and so it is not just Sullivan using 'violence' metaphorically); it is also metaphoric in the sense that it is linguistic violence that operates through metaphors. And one of the key metaphors [17] is from *Frankenstein.*

Beyond serving as a form of violence against transgender women, the monster metaphor arguably allows Raymond and Daly to sharpen their critique of the medical system (Raymond xxi). Transgender writer and activist Kate Bornstein, while pointing out the viciousness of Raymond's attack against transsexuals, generously commends the book for "its intelligent highlighting of the male-dominated medical profession, and that profession's control of transsexual surgery" (Bornstein 46). It is not easy to isolate a critique of medicalization salvageable for transgender perspectives from Raymond's argument (beyond the general notion that the profession is male-dominated), because the viciousness of the one and the highlighting of the other are so fused. Daly's and Raymond's attack on what they perceive to be misguided, megalomaniac, ethically questionable "sons of Frankenstein" is propped up by their casting of transsexuals as monsters, rendering "the body (and in some sense the subjectivity) of the person [...] monstrous," as Nikki Sullivan suggests (Sullivan 558).

This singular focus on the body is characteristic of transphobic uses of the monster metaphor. Jason Cormwell notes that "[m]any still seem afraid of 'monsters,' even though surgeries purportedly reconstruct as natural both intersexed/hermaphroditic and transsexed bodies" (Cromwell 36). Cromwell here rightly points out the contradictions in how the 'natural' and the 'monstrous' are often mobilized in relation to intersex and transsexual bodies: 'Monsters' are the rationalization for surgeries as well as the feared outcome. For mainstream and transphobic uses of the monster, it is the surgically modified body that is seen as monstrous. Transgender legal scholar Alex Sharpe suggests that this is why the monster is a relevant figure to discuss when analyzing transsexual legal decisions: "The relevance of the monster persists because legal recognition has, in the main, been confined to post-operative transsexual people" (Sharpe 99). Similarly, the doctor and the monster are so logical a pair for the likes of Raymond, because they define transsexuality narrowly in relation to surgeries.

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[17] There are other metaphors, such as rape (or rather, in Daly, "Rapism" (Daly 70)) – and "Nazi medical experiments," which Raymond suggests are somehow connected to trans surgery and which she links explicitly to Frankensteinian horror, when she writes they "read like a series of horror stories" (Raymond 148).

The monster's body works somewhat differently in transgender narratives. While Susan Stryker and many other transgender writers reclaim the Frankenstein monster in its 'man-made' body, it is important to note that the uses of the metaphor of the monster are more varied in transgender narratives than in the narrow surgical definitions of its transphobic uses. Indeed, even when writing about hers and the monster's body, Stryker arguably reclaims more the monster's origin (story) than any physical characteristics:

> The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born (Stryker, "My Words" 245)

– and in any case she reclaims a lot more than that (from his eloquence to his rage). The temporal and teleological logics of surgery (with terms like "pre-op" and "post-op" as if there was only one surgery and as if this one surgery defined transsexuals) have never applied to 'transsexuals' outside of medical textbooks –

and cannot even begin to address the plethora of trans folks under the transgender umbrella, from transsexuals to genderqueers, from straight crossdressers to transgender butches. Because there are various surgical and medical procedures with varying availability and desirability for different people, Frankenstein appears in transgender discussions of specific surgeries rather than in reference to some kind of monolithic "post-operative" transsexual body:

> Some FTMs/transmen call the results of phalloplastic surgeries 'frankendicks,' a term that conjures up an image of foreign parts attached to one's body with resultant scarring and ugliness. Many feel that the term is an apt description for the results of most phalloplasties (Cromwell 113f.).

Here "franken-" is a prefix for dissastifying surgical results rather than surgeries in general, but the conjuring up of "foreign parts" and "ugliness" draws on the same image associations as Daly and Raymond. Trans scholar and publisher Trystan Cotten criticizes: "At times, the discourse of genital surgery descends into the verbal gutter where we openly and (seemingly) without reservation describe trans men's penises as 'frankendicks,' 'mangled mutilations,' and 'insensate sausages'" (Cotten, *Hung Jury* 3). Transgender legal advocate Shannon Minter writes in the Foreword to Cotten's collection of FTM genital surgery testimonies: "Like too many other advocates and community members, I have portrayed genital surgeries for transgender men in overly negative terms" (Cotten, *Hung Jury* i). While Minter used these negative characterizations for legal advocacy work on behalf of transgender clients, he explains his turn away from such "franken-" descriptions of surgical results:

> Even if [these statements] are accurate in some limited sense about the outcomes of some particular surgical techniques and individual surgeries, they paint with far too broad a brush. They are needlessly harsh and disparaging. They discount the subjective experiences of transgender men. They play into damaging stereotypes of transgender people as freakish and tragic (Cotten, *Hung Jury* ii).

Despite attempts to limit the impact of the monster metaphor to a specific body part/surgical result, such critiques end up silencing those with “frankendicks,” much like when in Daly’s and Raymond’s use of Frankenstein metaphorics “the voice of the explicitly modified other is silenced” as monstrous (Sullivan 560).

Whether reclaimed or partially denounced, the surgically modified body is not the only one that appears in texts by transgender authors. In fact, it is sometimes the body *before* medical transition – the so-called ‘natural’ or ‘normal’ body – that is described as monstrous in transgender narratives. Joy Ladin writes, for example:

> While I hid in the shell of my pretreatment body – a body that, though monstrous to me, was accepted as normal by those around me – I felt I stood outside the human species, a species heartbreakingly beautiful and dauntingly strange, composed of creatures who belonged to and with each other (Ladin, *Door* 4f.).

Monstrosity for Ladin is a way of addressing not characteristics of a body, but feelings of gender dysphoria and alienation.

While transphobic uses of monster tropes generally draw on ideas of monstrous bodies and physical monstrosity, transgender metaphorizations of the monster draw on a variety of concepts of monstrosity, including (as Ladin does) ones where “monstrosity lies in interiority or psyche” (Sharpe 51). Transgender and transphobic uses, then, both map onto the two understandings of monstrosity that Alex Sharpe observes in her Foucaultian reading of how monstrosity appears in British law:

> In the context of transsexuality, and as already noted, both understandings of the concept of monstrosity are at play. In the first instance, the transsexual is an example of Foucault’s abnormal individual. In this respect, monstrosity lies in interiority of psyche. […] The transsexual can also be understood as a monstrosity in terms of the older meaning of the concept. This is possible

> because the transsexual brings the body and its transformation to the center stage of legal analysis (Sharpe 92).

Sharpe notes that the shift in ideas of monstrosity that Foucault traces with the figure of the "abnormal individual"[18] toward interiority, toward psychic monstrosity, has merely "expanded" the concept of the monster. The legal regulation of transsexual bodies, Sharpe argues, is a good example that "[i]t is not the case that the older meaning of the concept has been replaced by the modern" (Sharpe 87). Instead, "from the perspective of law, the transsexual can be viewed as a monster at the level of both interiority and exteriority" (Sharpe 8). Many of the ways in which Frankenstein metaphors are used for/by/against transgender confirm Sharpe's claim that both levels of monstrosity can still be brought into play for different agendas.

The Transgender Monster

How, then, does monstrosity appear when reclaimed, rather than renounced, in transgender writing? What exactly is being reclaimed? The following section will – starting with Susan Stryker's "Words to Victor Frankenstein," one of Transgender Studies' inaugural pieces – present several examples of monsters in transgender rhetorics that highlight the salient features of this trope: Transgender metaphorizations claim the monster as a site of – sometimes "heroic" – agency. They carve out a transgender speaking position in the face of the silencing gestures of mainstream (and feminist-separatist) transphobia and they insist on a transgender epistemological position, on articulating what I am calling dysphoric knowledge, in the face of psycho-medical diagnostic and surgical authority. As a figure laden with negative affect, the monster, even when imagined at his most heroic, is a way of addressing feelings of politicized rage, of gender dysphoria, shame, and alienation from heteronormative gender and sexuality. These examples will help us discuss the politics and stakes of reclaiming the monster.

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[18] The "abnormal individual" is characterized by a double breach: "modern deviant identities and/or desires are capable of constituting a double breach, of law and nature" (Sharpe 8).

Susan Stryker, writing in 1994, reclaims the monster (most directly in the passage that serves as this chapter's epigraph) in search of a voice. She claims transsexual bodies as "viable sites of subjectivity" by drawing on the *Frankenstein* novel in particular:

> Frankenstein's monster articulates its unnatural situation within the natural world with far more sophistication in Shelley's novel than might be expected by those familiar only with [...] James Whale's classic films from the 1930s. [...] this is not the monster who speaks to me so potently of my own situation as an openly transsexual being. I emulate instead Mary Shelley's literary monster, who is quick-witted, agile, strong, and eloquent (Stryker, "My Words" 248).

Stryker uses the eloquent monster's hard-won verbal agency to carve out a transsexual speaking position. Stryker's turn to the eloquent literary, rather than the grunting filmic monster might have to do with the filmic monster's closer association with the monstrous body (which, as we have seen, is also at the center of transphobic versions of the transgender monster). Many scholars of the Frankenstein films note the particular role of the monster's body. Shane Denson, for example, in his essay on James Whale's films as "melodramas of incorporation" writes that "both *Frankenstein* and its sequel concern the search for a fitting body: Frankenstein's attempt to create a living being from corpses in 1931, and the resulting monster's search for a female companion in 1935" (Denson 215). While such a "search for a fitting body" might sound suggestive to transgender readings (though the body being searched – creature or companion

– is always that of an other), Stryker emphasizes that because "[u]nlike the monster, we often successfully cite the culture's visual norms of gendered embodiment" (Stryker, "My Words" 247), the monster's relationship to nature, origin narratives, and language are more important to her metaphorizations of the transgender monster than the monster's body.

In drawing on the literary monster, Stryker, of course, also establishes herself as a reader. Shelley's monster, too, appears to want to prove his humanity through the reading of classical works of literature. The reading not just of classical literature, but also of transsexual autobiography[19] plays a big role in transgender narratives of coming-out and self-naming. According to Jay Prosser:

> Self-naming in the autobiographies is typically an 'instance' (but my point is that as simultaneously revisionary and visionary, as narrative it is never an instance) enabled by the reading of other transsexual narratives, sometimes newspapers, but often previous transsexual biographies or autobiographies (Prosser, *Second Skins* 124).

This 'self-naming' as 'transsexual' is, of course, the taking on of a name that precedes the reading and writing subject as the name of a diagnosis, a pathology, a sexual classification – and is in some ways a gesture that marks a kind of monstrous subjectivity. In this instance, then, the monstrous subject does not raise from the surgeon's operating table so much as from the nomenclature of transsexual autobiography and its interplay with early 20th-century sexology (of course, the surgeon's table is very much part of the same discursive space of transgender history and discourse).

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[19] Autobiography itself, of course, is and gives a particular form of/to the modern subject.

Over the course of her “Words to Victor Frankenstein […],” Stryker likens herself to the monster in various regards, using a reading of *Frankenstein* to verbalize and interpret her own experience:

> I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein. […] [L]ike the monster’s as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist (Stryker, “My Words” 245).

It becomes clear here how Zowie Davy seriously mischaracterizes the stakes of Stryker’s piece when she criticizes that “[u]nfortunately, [Stryker] does not make bodies of difference, with sociocentric multiplicities, appear in her own work and leaves them as literary metaphors” (Davy 54). While Davy is, not least for disciplinary reasons as a sociologist, focused, even in her use of the term “aesthetics,” on physical transition and body modification, Stryker’s playing through of the transgender monster metaphor is no less seriously concerned with “bodies of difference.” In fact, Stryker’s exploration of the transgender monster is all about thinking through the relationship between language and materiality:

> The rage itself is generated by the subject’s situation in a field governed by the unstable but indissoluble relationship between language and materiality, a situation in which language organizes and brings into signification matter that simultaneously eludes definitive representation and demands its own perpetual rearticulation in symbolic terms (Stryker, “My Words” 252).

At the center of Stryker’s concern is what she calls “transgender rage,” which animates a politically radicalized transgender subjectivity. Davy’s dismissal of “literary metaphor” fails to appreciate that, for Stryker, metaphor is not “literary” as opposed to some other supposedly “non-literary” realm of bodily modification with the appearance of a more direct relationship with signification. The monster, for Stryker, is precisely a way to talk about the way seemingly literal embodiment comes to have gendered meaning.

Rage is one of the most important characteristics of the monster that Stryker picks up on in her piece. What is striking about the monster's rage in the book, and makes it part of his struggle for subjectivity, is that the monster is an herbivore, or, in more contemporary human terms, a vegan. Requiring only "acorns and berries" for "sufficient nourishment" (M. W. Shelley 99), he is not an animal-like predator, hunting for food. His killings are not naturalized in the novel. By contrast, in James Whale's film version, there is, as Susan Tyler Hitchcock notes, a "criminal brain" that serves as its own kind of naturalization – one in terms of early 19th-century ideas of hereditary criminality (Hitchcock 154). Instead, the killings in the novel are emotional, psychologically motivated. They are the result of his rage and anger, his response as a subject to the world: "I am malicious because I am miserable; am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?" (M. W. Shelley 98). In the novel, the killings evidence his agency and as part of his linguistic self-making constitute him as a modern self with an interior life. This is why the monster's rage is such an appealing source to draw from for Stryker. Not only is the monster's rage not naturalized, his body, like that of transsexuals, is placed in an antagonistic relationship to discourses of "Nature." Stryker emphasizes this as one of the aspects about the monster that she is drawn to:

> Transsexual embodiment, like the embodiment of the monster, places its subject in an unassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship to a Nature in which it must nevertheless exist (M. W. Shelley 248).

Stryker's transgender rage is directed against positions such as Raymond's and Daly's that naturalize sexual binarism and use 'Nature' to deny gendered recognition to transsexuals.

Stryker also rages against medical authority. Stryker finds similarities between the monster's discovery of his creator's journals, his realization of his origins and monster status (M. W. Shelley 87), and her acquiring 'transsexual' as a label (as well, perhaps, as her work as a transgender historian):

> I can describe how I acquired a monstrous identity by taking on the label 'transsexual' to name parts of myself that I could not otherwise explain. I, too, have discovered the journals of the men who made my body, and who have made the bodies of creatures like me since the 1930s (Stryker, "My Words" 249).

With "the men who made my body," Stryker references more than specific men (her surgeon and endocrinologist did not personally write journals in the 1930s), taking the metaphor from the level of individual creature/monster to that of transsexuals as a group and doctors as part of larger medical structures. Likening these medical sources and pathologizing descriptions to Dr. Frankenstein's diary makes clear that these medical discourses are written in a language and are framing her body in a way that is distressing to Stryker as both their metaphorical creature and reader. While "transsexual" as a label names parts of herself Stryker "could not otherwise explain," it also means acquiring a "monstrous identity." The way Stryker describes this situation of (self-)naming suggests that the otherwise unexplained parts precede and exceed the term organizing them into sexological knowledge. There is a perspective and experience that begins before and remains distinct from psycho-medical expertise and transsexual case history, a kind of knowledge – dysphoric knowledge – about these "parts," their lack of explanatory language, and their eventual naming, about dysphoria and the "taking on" of such a label (which can only be taken on to the degree that it is already given – discursively and diagnostically) that renders this identity "monstrous."

This position of agential monstrosity, of responding to the conditions of one's very emergence, is characteristic of the kind of transgender subjectivity that Stryker carves out in her use of the monster: "As we rise up from the operating tables of our rebirth, we transsexuals are something more, and something other, than the creatures our makers intended us to be" (Stryker, "My Words" 248). Compromised, "unnatural" origins do not preclude one from rising from the operating table to rage against the intentions of one's makers or against being "shunned and hated."

The creature's being "shunned and hated" are also points of reference for many other transgender uses of Frankenstein. It is not just the eloquent monster of the book that features in such accounts: "There's a wonderful scene in James Whale's Frankenstein where everyone who sees the monster screams and runs away. […] This was, more or less, my experience of high school," writes transgender author Aaron Raz Link in the memoir he co-authored with his mother (Link and Raz 27). The monster here figures as a foil for early self-recognition and identification with the monster as an outcast. This identification reads the monster as a heroic figure, a good guy: "The one fact of my life untouched by puberty was that I was a monster, which was okay. Monsters were the good guys" (Link and Raz 24). Whereas Stryker connects as a transsexual with the monster's "unnatural" body, his precarious subjectivity and his rage, Link draws on the monster's loneliness and singularity for a description of a pre-coming out and non-adult sense of self:

> I thought I'd figured out about men and monsters. Men and women were *adult* and *human* and had romances in various combinations. I couldn't be a man in the human world, and I wasn't a woman. I was a monster. And monsters don't get romances. [...] True to my pedigree from Frankenstein to Mr. Spock, I was a monster who would be a man, without knowing what being a man was (Link and Raz 34).

For Link, "monster" is a way of dis-identifying with the world of adult, naturalized binary gender. While my use of masculine pronouns for the Creature throughout this chapter follows Mary Shelley's novel and is meant to resist Brooks' move of finding the transsexual in *Frankenstein* in particular, Link draws attention to the fact that the monster figure (like the child) more broadly is often associated with a kind of 'dis-gendering,' which is why monsters are frequently referred to with 'it' pronouns. In Link's passage, having no access to being "a man in the human world" also means being excluded from romances. For Link's narration of his High School self's understanding of the world of binary gender, disgendering results in desexualizing. The monster, however, functions as an identificatory figure that gives him access to imaging himself as a different kind of man, as someone who "would be a man, without knowing what a man was," as someone with a trajectory toward gendered adulthood, after all.

Following Susan Stryker in the political attempt "to divorce the concept of 'monster' from an inherent evil," (pseudonymous) author Boots Potential, like Link, also mobilizes the figure of the monster as an early source of identification – a figure that crystallizes a trans identification. In his contribution to the edited collection *From the Inside Out: Radical Gender Transformation, FTM and Beyond*, he rewrites the B-movie monster story with a happy ending:

> My favorite monsters are the B-movie variety. This is the source from where my gender enactments are inspired. [...] It is interesting that I came to identify as trans in and through my gender-as-monster ideas. [...] For once, the story ends happily, and the monsters are the heroes (Potential 39).

For Potential, the story ends happily when the monsters are the heroes, move to the place of protagonist. A heroic, politicized version of the monster also appears in C. Jacob Hale's claim to the monster's agency in his call that transgender men

> must be monstrous enough to meet our moral and political predicament, to exercise our ghostly agency in accordance with feminist and other gender-liberatory principles. We must also be monstrous enough to restructure the world, to create spaces for new cultural formations and new forms of discursive agency (Hale, "Tracing a Ghostly Memory in My Throat: Reflections of Ftm Feminist Voice and Agency" 59f.).

While the monster's status as shunned outsider speaks to feelings of despair and high school horror, it sometimes also becomes the very starting point for remaking the monster into a heroic political agent. Rather than refuting the monster attribution, transgender men, in Hale's formulation, must be "monstrous enough" – must reclaim transsexual monstrosity – to restructure the world in such a way that it makes space for what is now deemed monstrous gender. Similarly, Susan Stryker writes about redefining a life worth living: "Like that creature, I assert my worth as a monster in spite of the conditions my monstrosity requires me to face, and redefine a life worth living" (Stryker, "My Words" 254). This agency might be "ghostly," Hale suggests, but the "predicament" nevertheless brings with it the possibility for action and for creating new spaces for discursive agency.

Not all who envision a happy ending for the monster do so in an ostensibly political way. Some turn to a rewriting of the scene of monster-making in Frankenstein to reclaim not just the monster, but the doctor with him. Ali

Cannon's poem "A Trilogy of Horror and Transmutation," which appeared in the same collection as Potential's text, describes a first testosterone shot in Frankenstein images:

> I am transfused
> like that Frankenstein movie scene […]
> the medical moment standing for so much
> in the scheme of monster making […]

Like many others, Cannon brings the medical moment into focus. But unlike Stryker and others, who claim monster subjectivity and rage against, and in critical distance to, medical authority, Cannon carves out a position of patient agency, of the happy monster's agency to consent. Doctor and monster here are one, but on the doctor side. Cannon collectivizes the "experiment" and responsibilities of transitioning, blurring the lines between "creature", "doctor", "everyone":

> meanwhile the doctor stands over the creature
> but the doctor is as much me as any medical professional
> it being everyone's collective experiment
> to deliver the transgendered unto themselves
> (Cannon 40–43).

Cannon uses the metaphor to claim a somewhat sanitized version of monstrous vulnerability and bodily transgression. This monster-as-consenting-patient experiences the doctor's medical authority as exercised in his favor, as a kind of agency by proxy. What is more, this team of patient/monster and doctor are not just in agreement, they also are part of a larger community of 'everyone'. Cannon does not foreground Frankenstein's lonely, outcast monster, but re-writes him into a happy monster successfully longing for sociality, a monster who is involved in a communal process of (self-)making. This final scenario is so happy that one wonders how the “monster” came to be a “monster” in the first place. The injurious, transphobic, and denunciatory uses of the term which are why transgender appropriations of the monster can even be thought of as ‘reclaiming’ anything are almost obscured in a rewriting this thorough.

The politics of reclaiming the monster – as heroic subject, as a term around which to organize a “restructuring” of the world – like reclaiming many other terms with pejorative, violent, and exclusionary histories, are complicated. In her analysis of “how certain individuals or groups come to receive the label monster” and her tracing of monster status as an “effect of legal interpretation” (Sharpe 2; 109), Alex Sharpe notes that while the recognition of the fact that anybody can be subject to the interpellation of monster

> might be a place from which a progressive politics might begin, it remains the case that only some individuals or groups are, at any given historical moment, demonized by the term monster. While we might all be monsters, we do not all bear the same relationship to this term (Sharpe 2).

The particular relationship to the term might be informed not just by its history in relationship to transgender, but also in relationship to categories such as race, disability, and nation.

While Enoch Page and Matt Richardson do not explicitly mention the figure of the monster in their essay about “trans subjectivity as an embodied form of Blackness” (Richardson and Page 63), the monster seems to lurk in the “fear” that – as they argue – exceeds the explanatory power of ‘transphobia’:

> We cannot readily see this when the fear evoked by our presence is equated only with transphobia, as if the issue is purely gender expression and sexuality, but this approach eliminates the central factor of race and racism (Richardson and Page 59).

Because of his long history as a figure of different devaluations, including racialized ones, we can understand the monster as a figure of this fear, a figure that is not limited to a single-issue view of transphobia that Richardson and Page criticize. In my view, this potential to call up racist, transphobic, and a number of other histories, makes the monster a figure that is both especially fraught, but also particularly open to more nuanced readings and reclaimings.

The monster is, of course, not the only injurious term that has been reclaimed by oppressed groups in recent decades. Of those, "freak" is perhaps the closest relative of the monster. Eli Clare compares the term "freak" to "queer" and wonders why

> the word *freak* [doesn't] connect me easily and directly to subversion? The answer I think lies in the transition from freak show to doctor's office, from curiosity to pity, from entertainment to pathology. [...] Today's freakdom happens in hospitals and doctors' offices (Clare, *Exile & Pride* 103f.).

According to Clare, the voyeurist and explotative structures of gazing that animated the freak show have moved into medical spaces – and as such retain their traumatic character for many disabled people. The history of attempts in the disability rights movement to reclaim "freak" appears to struggle with some of the same issues that the monster raises. In fact, Clare explicitly relates "freak" to a history of monstrosity:

> At the time of the freak show, disabled people were no longer monsters in the minds of nondisabled people, but rather extraordinary creatures, not entirely human, about whom everyone – 'professional' people and the general public alike – was curious (Clare, *Exile & Pride* 97).

The monster as a figure, of course, does not get completely supplanted by the advent of the freak show. "Freak" is a term associated with the voyeurism (Clare, *Exile & Pride* 98) and the complex history of freak shows as exploitative but also employing spaces for disabled, racialized, and differently gendered performers: "Working as a freak may have been a lousy job, but nonetheless it was a job" (Clare, *Exile & Pride* 103). "Freak" and "monster" are both terms that have been used to mark disability, gender, and race (and/or all at once). In her book *Sideshow U.S.A.*, Rachel Adams writes that "[i]nstances of sex and gender ambiguity were among the freak show's favorite obsessions" (Adams 124) and that sexual ambiguity was an important part of the resurgence of live freak shows in New York City in the late 1990s:

> Drawing connections between the transgendered bodies and queer identities of their performers, these troupes specialize in granting visibility to sexual and gender perversions that would have been unthinkable in the past (Adams 12).

While these performers reclaim the "formal composition and spatial layout" (Adams 12) of freak shows, the history of certain bodies becoming "objects of visual curiosity" and of how some of those so designated "have managed to transform that situation into a source of profit, creativity, and social critique" (Adams 15), this move is part of a performance practice that works somewhat differently from the circulation of the term "monster" through transgender discourse more broadly. It also might be worth noting that the late-1990s queer appropriations of the freak show that *grants* "visibility to sexual and gender perversions" would appear to use the freak show as a technology of visual curiosity very differently than those whose bodies were *marked* by visibility in historic freak shows.

While I do think Clare is right in reminding us of the relationship between "freak" and "monster" – and the complex history of "freakdom" –, I focus on the "monster" for two reasons. For one thing, "monster" appears to have much greater off-stage currency, as evidenced by Lynnee Breedlove's turn to imagery from James Whale's films in his autobiographical stage piece (and book) *One Freak Show* to discuss a "First Hit" of testosterone: "Rain pours down, and lightning and thunder crash, signs from *Frankenstein*" (Breedlove 83). As a performer, Breedlove is a "freak," as a transgender man considering taking testosterone, he turns to *Frankenstein*. More importantly, "monster" is the term we find in transgender rhetorics much more frequently. Nevertheless, Eli Clare's analysis of the complications of reclaiming the term "freak" is instructive for such an endeavor:

> *Freak* is another story. Unlike *queer* and *crip*, it has not been widely embraced in my communities. For me *freak* has a hurtful, scary edge; it takes *queer* and *cripple* one step too far; it doesn't feel good or liberating (Clare, *Exile & Pride* 84).

"Monster" seems to have a similar "edge" as "freak," which makes the term resistant to feel-good moments. This resistance to feel-good, prideful reclaimings is precisely what makes the monster such a generative figure for negative affect, I would argue. Moreover, we can learn from Rachel Adams' claim that "freak" "refuses the logic of identity politics" (Adams 10) and think of the monster figure as always raising – similarly – intersectional questions because of its complex histories and attributions.

Katrina Roen argues the opposite in her work on transgender and racial marginalization: According to her, the term monster carries the same problems of "eliminating race and racism" that Page and Richardson criticize in the use of transphobia. Roen is critical of reclaiming the monster, reading the use of the figure as part of what she criticizes as the "racial blindness" of much of transgender theorizing: “If we think of colonisation as a process of rendering racialised bodies monstrous, how might we approach differently the reclaiming of transsexual bodies as monstrous?” (Roen 664). Page, Richardson, and Roen’s urging of Transgender Studies toward more intersectional approaches and particularly toward more careful analyses of race is of great importance. However, Roen’s singling out of the monster as an example of white privilege makes sense in this larger trajectory of her essay, but it forecloses a more complex view of the monster metaphor. In asserting the whiteness of reclaiming the transsexual monster, in citing the monster’s history of racialization as a stumbling block to reclaiming the monster, Roen’s criticism overlooks the long history of anti-racist reclaimings of Frankenstein metaphors in the US.

Elizabeth Young traces the genealogy of Frankenstein as a metaphor in debates around race and nation in her book, arguing that

> Black Frankenstein stories effected four kinds of antiracist critique: they humanized the slave; they explained, if not justified, his violence; they condemned the slaveowner; and they exposed the instability of white power (Young 5).

Young notes that such antiracist critiques, in remaking the black Frankenstein metaphor, keep the monster in circulation – and the terms injurious histories with it:

> These works remake the metaphors of *Frankenstein* in radical ways, but they also show the difficulty, to paraphrase Audre Lorde, of using the monster’s tools to dismantle the monster’s house (Young 14).

Like Young’s examples of anti-racist works that use the black Frankenstein metaphor, examples of the transgender monster face the difficulty of formulating resistance in the same metaphorical language as the transphobic attack. However, Young’s artful wordplay that substitutes Lorde’s image of the “master” with the monster is itself illustrative of the suggestive power of metaphorical language, even when that language characterizes the monster as the owner of tools and house, when it would perhaps more accurately have to be thought of as either the tool (if one wanted to fit it into Lorde's image at all) or a term – the master's term – for those attacking the house. Lorde's use of "master" called upon a history of hierarchical, racist, slave-holding relations, which allowed her imagery of the master's house to suggest a structural critique in ways that substituting the word monster fails to do. Young rightly points to the difficulty in using the monster, but her repurposed slavery metaphor mischaracterizes the metaphor and the difficulty of *not* using it.

The monster trope has served and continues to serve many different narratives and counter-narratives, and the character and effectiveness of its politicization are not inherent in the metaphor, but in its particular employment. In fact, transphobic and racist uses of the metaphor must struggle to bracket those aspects of the monster that resonate with antiracist and transgender voices (perhaps just as much as the other way around):

> Yet Shelley's monster could only be used for racist rhetoric by severing the Frankenstein monster from his own sympathetic first-person voice, from the critique of injustice that accompanies his radical turn to violence, and from the narrative of doubling between monster and maker that implicates Victor Frankenstein in the monster's crimes at every turn. The monster could become a racist metaphor only, in other words, by dismembering the image of 'Frankenstein' from the novel *Frankenstein* (Young 66).

This is yet another indication that we are not in "the monster's house" and the monster is not just the master's tool. That being said, that tool exists and becomes available (and somewhat unavoidable) within a certain discursive regime, as Young reminds us: "In a world not consistently devoted to demonizing blackness, there might be no need to reappropriate monstrosity" (Young 229). Of course, it is impossible to know what monstrosity and its potential reappropriations would look like in a world in which its histories and saliencies were different.

In this world where the monster is circulating as metaphoric violence against transgender people, there are, of course, also examples of attempts at rejecting rather than reclaiming the transgender monster. Paula Grossman, criticizing what were then the "Harry Benjamin Standards of Care," rules of access to transgender medical care (ironically called "standards of care" as if they had always been the assurances of medical quality that they are under the aegis of what is now the "World Professional Association for Transgender Health," rather than hurdles for the patient (Coleman et al.)), does not reclaim the monster, but uses it against doctors instead:

> In God's name, who are these non-transsexual doctors, to dare to establish so heartless a prerequisite to helping suffering human beings? What would the American Cancer Society do about a cancer specialist who refused his services to a cancer victim until he would get a divorce? Or, in other branches of medicine, the heart foundations, the epilepsy and respiratory disease foundations, and the like, in the cases of doctors who wouldn't treat patients until or unless they would forsake their nearest and dearest? Is such a procedure part of the Hippocratic oath? *Are they indeed doctors? Or monsters?* (Grossman 13)

Transsexuals here are "suffering human beings," not monsters, doctors are monsters if they refuse to treat transsexuals like cancer or epilepsy patients. This might be seen as a direct reply to Janice Raymond, for whom trans-related surgeries are monstrous and make transsexual humanity is questionable. On the contrary, Grossman suggests, doctors who do not offer access to medical transition are monsters through their failure to recognize transsexuals as suffering human beings. Instead of being reclaimed, the monster, in Grossman, remains the non-human, the non-humane, an injurious term – and a term the writer of *A Handbook for Transsexuals* distances herself from as she uses it against others. In not reclaiming, but simply redeploying the monster, Grossman keeps the logic that allowed Raymond and Daly to denounce the transgender monster intact. Given the discursive circulation of the monster, not reclaiming it frequently takes this shape of saying one is not a monster (and thereby always, either explicitly or implicitly, reifying that, instead, someone else is).

As Grossman's example demonstrates, disclaiming the monster trope is by no means necessarily politically more capacious, careful, or less potentially problematic than reclaiming it – quite the opposite. Kate Bornstein writes that through "the myth" that they are "malevolent, mentally ill, or monsters," transgender people "got left holding the cultural bag" (Bornstein 13). It might be impossible to just pass the bag on or get rid of it altogether, but holding it does accord the opportunity to see what is inside. Dysphoric knowledge emerges precisely from getting stuck holding the cultural bag.

That does not mean that the bag can just be carried around like a trophy, either. At any closer than cursory examination, it is clear that authors such as Susan Stryker are very much aware that the monster is somewhat resistant to completely recuperative, heroic, and happy rewritings. Exploring the implications of a transsexual Frankenstein reading in some detail, Stryker does not overlook the ambivalence of Shelley's monster in his (righteous, but dark) rage. She wants to lay claim to a "monstrous identity" but "without using it as a weapon against others or being wounded by it myself" (Stryker, "My Words" 246). On the one hand, Stryker acknowledges that the monster metaphor is an ambivalent figure because of its capacity to wound. On the other hand, she also recognizes it as a figure that is not amenable to a happy rewriting that excludes, overcomes, or glosses over negative feelings. She herself uses the monster as a metaphor of bodily disidentification and dysphoria, for the "abject despair over what gender had done to me" (Stryker, "My Words" 251).[20] A similar association between monstrosity and an abiding negative affect, can be found in Joy Ladin's writing about "my primal sense of ugliness, my lifelong belief that, as a transsexual, I was a monster" (Ladin, *Door* 227). The monster then does not just have too much transphobic history or injurious potential for a full-fledged happy ending, it is also a figure that is used to talk about negative affect and as such resists prideful resolution.

Given that it is used to metaphorize such feelings of dysphoria, disidentification, loneliness, and exclusion, the monster metaphor is hard to completely assimilate into a pride narrative (which in lesbian and gay contexts often takes on an air of post-Stonewall pride vs. pre-Stonewall shame). Nor, as we will see in chapter III, can it be pushed into a triumphant reveling in (prideful-sounding) shame that Queer Theory's recent turn to negativity sometimes seems to suggest. Transgender scholar Henry Rubin, for instance, writes about his inability to transform negative feelings into positive ones: "I try to transform 'transsexualism as punishment' into 'transsexualism as blessing' but my rage interferes" (Rubin, "Reading" 320). Rubin instead draws attention to the "[s]adness over the loss of a body that I never had and never will have" (Rubin, "Reading" 319). This rage and sadness occupy a prominent position in the use of the transgender monster, as we have seen. What can we learn about the kinds of dysphoric knowledge circulating here from bringing the transsexual (monster) in conversation with a reading of the role of negative affect in *Frankenstein*?

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[20] What it is that gender has done is itself an interesting statement that falls precisely between the lines of a relation to her own body and the way that it gets to be read in the world. When Denise Riley asks: "can anyone fully inhabit a gender without a degree of horror?" (Riley, *"Am I That Name?" Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* 6), Stryker makes equally clear that there is also a degree of horror in finding oneself excluded from inhabiting a gender to the degree of fullness that "demands its own perpetual rearticulation" (Stryker, "My Words" 252). Moreover, the use of "horror" in relation to inhabiting gender would seem to be a clue for the popularity of the transgender monster metaphor.

Lessons from the Monster: Reading Affect in *Frankenstein* Through a Transgender Lens

In their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, editors Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth write:

> There is no single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be. If anything, it is more tempting to imagine that there can only ever be infinitely multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect: theories as diverse and singularly delineated as their own highly particular encounters with bodies, affects, worlds (Gregg and Seigworth 3).

This capaciousness is one of the reasons why the term "affect" has enjoyed such wide circulation and theoretical traction in recent literary and cultural studies. Gregg and Seigworth's formulation certainly allows us to situate gender dysphoria as one of those "highly particular encounters with bodies, affects, worlds". Though the rest of this chapter turns to psychologist Silvan Tomkins' theory of affect specifically, this is not meant to foreclose other uses and theories of affect in relation to transgender at other points. Turning to Tomkins offers a particular way of reading *Frankenstein* and Frankenstein's transgender potential that I intend to explore. In other words, I am drawing on Tomkins' work to read shame and disgust in Frankenstein – the novel and the metaphor. I am not using transgender to prove Tomkins is the final or only authority on affect.

Before it can be applied to *Frankenstein*, Tomkins' theory of affects needs a brief introduction. This must include a nod to the appeal of Tomkins to Queer theorists and the rediscovery of this mid-20th-century psychologist spearheaded by *Shame and Its Sisters*, a volume edited by Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank. Tomkins calls affects "the primary motivational system in human beings" (Tomkins, "What Are Affects?" 34) and describes them as "a number of responses which have self-rewarding and self-punishing characteristics" (Tomkins, "What Are Affects?" 41). According to him, the affect system is an innate system, a system with which human beings are "designed" (Tomkins, "What Are Affects?" 45). Acknowledging that "there is today no consensus on what the primary affects are, how many there are, what they should be called" (Tomkins, "What Are Affects?" 73), Tomkins, over the course of his writings, distinguishes between eight and nine (Tomkins, "Quest" 325) affects, among them interest, enjoyment, shame, and disgust. He sometimes gives them a joint name, such as "contempt-disgust" or "shame-humiliation," naming their range between "as experienced at low and as experienced at high intensity" . Each affect is associated with characteristic physiological responses, most importantly (in Tomkins' observations and classifications) facial expressions (Tomkins, "Quest" 313).

Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank note an important characteristic that makes Tomkins' work attractive to Queer theorists:

> Tomkins's disciplinary sources: […] social psychology, psychoanalysis […] are each structured around foundationally heterosexist assumptions. […] Tomkins's achievement seems to result not from a concertedly antihomophobic project (nor

> any marked gay interest, for that matter) but rather from, almost simply, finding a different place to begin (Sedgwick and Frank 99).

This different place to begin is different from Freud's approach – and, indeed, the absence of a heterosexist teleology is not merely notable as an absence, it is articulated in Tomkins explicitly as a rejection of the Freudian model: Sedgwick and Franks' footnote quotes a passage in which Tomkins chastises Freud's teleological privileging of "genital interpenetration" (Sedgwick and Frank 118 Fn.2). With passages such as these, Tomkins' affect theory lends itself to projects in Queer Studies, Transgender Studies, and related fields more easily than psychoanalytic theories that require more hedging and/or reading against the grain.[21] It is also is particularly suggestive to literary scholars' readings of *Frankenstein*, "because of the way it describes the two affects of greatest importance in Frankenstein, shame and disgust" (Hatch 34), as James Hatch argues.

In his 2008 article in the *European Romantic Review*, James C. Hatch presents a reading of *Frankenstein* in light of Tomkins' affect theory. Focusing on the affective responses surrounding the Creature, Hatch traces the disgust of the other characters at seeing him and the Creature's resultant shame in the novel. It is these negative affects, he argues, that cut the Creature off from sociality. The persistence of these negative affects, Hatch goes on to say, is ultimately irreconcilable with ethical readings of "sympathy" with the monster: "The presence of both powerful negative affects [disgust and shame; AKR] in the work undermines the lessons offered by the Creature's sympathy" (Hatch 34). In using Tomkins' theory to hold on to the "sheer, inexplicable, irreducible fact of how disgusting the Creature is" (Hatch 46), Hatch turns these affective responses into "facts" about the monster. Hatch's positing of the "sheer, inexplicable, irreducible fact" not only conflicts with the affects' ability to attach to any object in Tomkins, it also leaves the Creature's shame underexplored.

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[21] Of course, classical psychoanalytic theory [esp. Freud, Lacan, Klein…] is being used/re-read in such contexts all the time (I am not saying that this is not being done or cannot be done) – my point is simply that Tomkins' affect theory would seem to lend itself more easily to being taken up for projects critical of heteronormativity and gender binarism.

If, unlike Hatch, we start not with "disgust and fear" in the reactions of little William, Dr. Frankenstein, and other characters, but instead start with shame in the monster, we can read the story – and with it the monster metaphor – as one of dysphoric knowledge and embodiment. Silvan Tomkins writes that a description of the socialization of shame "should refer at once to the attitudes of others and to the total effect of these attitudes upon the self, as well as the endopsychic sources of shame" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 155). While Hatch opts mostly to read the Creature's shame in relation to the contempt "of all those he meets (and an internalization of that contempt)" (Hatch 38), there are other ways in which to understand the monster's affective responses in Shelley's novel on the basis of Tomkins' work. While Hatch cites Tomkins on shame's "role in forming self-consciousness" (Hatch 38), he seems to merely summarize without exploring this idea in connection with the monster. Tomkins argues that "[i]n contrast to all other affects, shame is an experience of the self by the self" and he refers to it as the "affect in which the self is salient" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 133; 135). If we consider reading the monster's shame as one of the ways in which he develops self-consciousness, Hatch's proposed contradiction between the monster's acquisition of language (sociality and subjectivity) and the negative affects through which the "Creature's appearance" forbids interpersonal experiences (Hatch 36) becomes questionable. Hatch argues that "the affects of shame and disgust serve to cut the Creature off from being part of a social structure; language becomes the only bridge between himself and human beings" (Hatch 39), but as we will see below, shame operates in more complex ways in *Frankenstein*.

Language is certainly central to the monster's development in the novel. He rages against the impossible and de-subjectified position his body is assigned to, but only after he has tried to speak against it. He plans to learn the cottagers' language before revealing himself to them, because he wants to be able to linguistically reinterpret his body for them. In a sense, this is precisely what happens for the novel's readers. "We are disposed as readers to sympathize with the monster," writes Halberstam, because all we have is his language. Unlike in the classic film version of the story, we cannot see him (Halberstam, *Skin Shows* 39), and his eloquent assertion of his humanity is on the same level of representation as are the descriptions of his body. The monster is sympathetic, in part, because he speaks (as we will see below, he is also sympathetic for affective reasons), because he makes his case so forcefully.

Knowing that he has to reinterpret his body for the cottagers, the monster prepares for a 'coming out,' if you will, and a coming out that is dependent on language and resignification:

> [A]lthough I eagerly longed to discover myself to the cottagers, I ought not to make the attempt until I had first become master of their language; which knowledge might enable me to make them overlook the deformity of my figure (M. W. Shelley 76).

Frankenstein is, as Brooks notes, a novel about "the capacity of language to create a body, one that in turn calls into question the language we use to classify and control bodies" (Brooks 220). This is a classic transgender issue: Jay Prosser, in his seminal book *Second Skins*, argues that there is an "original and thorough investment of transsexual subjectivity in narrative [...]" (Prosser, *Second Skins* 104). According to Prosser, "[n]arrative is also a kind of second skin: the story the transsexual must weave around the body in order that this body may be 'read'" (Prosser, *Second Skins* 101). The monster's struggle to find a language in which "to discover [himself] to" others in a way that will stave off seemingly unmediated conclusions drawn from his body speaks to what is at the heart of transgender narrative in a world of binary sex.

It may be true, as Hatch writes, that the Creature in *Frankenstein* ends up "cut off" from the kinds of sociality he desires. But in a novel with various narrative frames of letter writers and readers, storytellers and listeners, a novel in which the narrator is often himself a reader, the cottagers are by no means the only addressees of the monster's narrative. At the very least, the monster's language does work on the reader – and it does this work in conjunction with his shame. Shame as self-consciousness makes the monster readable as a self, just like language acquisition turns him into a figure readable as participating in literary bourgeois humanism, reading Plutarch, Goethe, and Milton. Shame as an affect that can be a "vicarious experience" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 223) opens up the possibility of considering the Creature's shame as provoking empathy and identification. From this perspective, instead of affect standing in the way of a kind of sympathetic reading of the Creature, shame could be considered one of its modes. In other words, the Creature's acquisition of language and frequently noted eloquence (Brooks 201; Young 31) are not the only bridge inciting the reader's identification and/or sympathy.

The monster's shame features most prominently in the passage narrated by the monster himself, in his first-person monologue. This monologue allows the reader to view the events from the monster's perspective, and this identification could, if we follow Tomkins, be heightened by the readers' vicarious experience of the monster's shame. This is precisely one of the ways in which the Creature could be said to become more sympathetic and human. Language and shame, I would argue, can thus be read alongside each other as two modes of the monster's becoming a – potentially sympathetic – subject.

It is possible to read not just the achievement of language as a moment of subjectification, but to give the very process of learning an affective turn: The monster learns because he identifies with the (other) humans and invests interest and enjoyment in sociality. The monster's socialization happens largely through watching the cottagers and the loving interactions he observes in their relationships (M. W. Shelley 88) – observations which he uses to imagine himself in similarly positive affective trafficking. It is precisely because of his positive affective investment during his "socialization" that the monster becomes vulnerable to shame (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 139f.). The monster becomes a knowing subject through affect (Tomkins, "What Are Affects?" 55). He goes to such great lengths to connect that he would make a perfect example of affects as a motivational system. Exhibiting affects that – in Tomkins view – are specifically human (Tomkins, "What Are Affects?" 37), the Creature presents as affectively human and this is an invitation for the reader to sympathize with him.

First, the monster's shame makes possible the vicarious experience of that shame by (some) readers. Readers can read his shame as a sign of his originally positive affective, sociality-seeking disposition. If "shame-humiliation is the negative affect linked with love and identification" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 140) and readers are fellow shame-able subjects, then the monster's experience of shame is most likely read as evidence of his capacity for love and identification. Secondly, in questioning his identity, the monster is not just searching for physical resemblance. He does not just come to regard himself as a monster through not resembling those around him. He also, and perhaps more importantly, finds his attempts at connection foiled. What is important for a shame reading in Tomkins' sense is that he seeks sociality: "I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me" (M. W. Shelley 81). According to Tomkins, shame felt in response to the other's disgust-contempt is predicated on positive affective investment in the contemptuous other:

> Unless there has been interest or enjoyment of the other person, or the anticipation of such positive feelings about the other, contempt from the other may activate surprise or distress or fear or anger, rather than shame (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 137).

This is the other way in which the monster's shame contributes to his functioning as a sympathetic character – His shame is evidence of his sociality-seeking, positive affective investment in his encounters with the other characters.

Even the monster's anger can be made sense of in terms of Tomkins' account of reactions to contempt. In a later chapter Tomkins asserts: "the most common response [to the other's contempt] is anger and counter-contempt or self-contempt or both" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 218). The novel's plot fits very nicely into such a Tomkinsian reading. As the monster's positive expectations of sociality continue to be disappointed, he moves from shame to anger and takes bloody revenge. Stephen Asma calls him "perhaps the most famous of the gentle-hearted giants gone bad" (Asma 11). Insofar as the monster does monstrous things, he moves from sympathetic to feared and disgusting figure in the eyes of the reader. It would seem that Hatch's attention to disgust/shame as complicating sympathetic readings of the monster underplays the monster's actual behavior: The monster's committing of murder and mayhem poses a perhaps more substantial obstacle.

Having considered readings of shame in its self-conscious, socializing, and empathetic aspects, we turn to the pivotal scene of the monster's shame in Shelley's text. The following lengthy quote allows us to consider both Hatch's interpretation of the monster's shame and the interwoven parts of the monster's monologue:

> Having seen his face in a pool of water, the Creature now knows that the truth of his face, that overwhelming sign that apparently cannot be misunderstood, needs to be 'overlook[ed],' that it must be made invisible, or covered (i.e., absent and therefore available to representation) and not unseeable (i.e., present but overwhelming). In seeing his own face for the first time, the Creature is horrified: 'I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers – their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity.' Here shame ('despondence and mortification')

> follows from truth, the overwhelmingly convincing horror of the face seen in the water. The Creature learns the truth from the true reflection of his unchangeably truly signifying face (Hatch 41).

Where the monster's narrative only invokes "reality" once, Hatch overloads the passage with a lot of "truth": the "truth" of the monster's "face," the "true" reflection of the "truly" signifying face. Hatch, steeped in Tomkins' more face-oriented passages, reduces the monster's response to his "face". However, when we read the monster's words, he seems to refer to his body more generally ("form"/"deformity"/"monster that I am"). Reading Tomkins, it is worth parsing through the difference between the body as a source of shame (which can – but does not have to – include the face) and shame as a bodily, and for Tomkins most importantly facial, experience. Tomkins, by his own account, originally registered affects as a "total bodily response" centering on the face (Tomkins, "Quest" 309), a centering that he emphasized when he classified affects by their "component facial responses" (Tomkins, "What Are Affects?" 74), leading him to conclude that "the face is the site of all the affects" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 134). While this facial response is present in all, but "experienced as most salient in shame," this does not mean that the face is the necessary (or only) source of bodily shame. Tomkins writes about the body as

> a source of shame insofar as it fails to support interpersonal communion or self-regard. If the body is considered unattractive, the individual may feel shame because of the attenuation of his interest and pride in his own body, and because his body may fail to sufficiently excite others to maintain desired interpersonal relationships (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 194).

Tomkins here offers an interesting light in which to consider the above passage from *Frankenstein*. There is a decisive shift that occurs when we consider affect not as immediate testimony to some truth about the body (shame and disgust are the "unchangeable truth" of the disgusting body), but read this scene as one in which the monster experiences affectively, knows through acute moments of dysphoria, what it means to be viewed, and come to view oneself, as a monster.

The monster's view of his reflection in the "transparent pool" is no direct apprehension of something disgusting. We can perhaps take the (mis-)use of "transparent" instead of "reflecting" as an indication that this is no direct access to an ontological feature of his body. Instead, this "mirror" (and as a "pool", it is a particularly untrustworthy mirror with an easily disturbed surface at that) invokes a moment of the monster's facing his own body as an other, seeing it from the outside, a moment of confronting the ways in which it is viewed by, or more accurately, imagined to appear to the outside world. Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost* stares into her own version of this transparent pool, water "spread into a liquid plain, then stood unmov'd, pure as th' expanse of heav'n." Eve's monologue unfolds much differently than that of the creature in *Frankenstein*:

> As I bent down to look, just opposite
> A shape within the wat'ry gleam appeared,
> Bending to look on me, I started back,
> It started back, but pleased I soon returned
> Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
> Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
> Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
> Had not a voice thus warned me, 'What thou seest
> What there thou seest, fair creature, is thyself:
> With thee it came and goes; but follow me,
> And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
> Thy coming and thy soft embraces—he
> Whose image thou art; him thou shalt enjoy
> Inseparably thine; to him shalt bear
> Multitudes like thyself, and thence be called
> Mother of human race' (Milton 1884).

Instead of filling her with horror, Eve greets her reflection with "sympathy and love," and the realization that the reflection is indeed her self is transformed into a promise of companionship and motherhood. While we should note that bearing multitudes "to him" is not exactly a feminist promise for Eve, the contrast of this vision to the lonely, outcast, and companionless monster in Shelley's novel is stark. In a chain of intertextuality, Shelley plays on Milton (and Narcissus), who plays on Narcissus. This literary allusion is very explicit even on the level of the plot: We know that the monster has read Milton and he repeatedly compares himself to Adam in *Paradise Lost*, an equally unfavorable comparison (M. W. Shelley 66, 87), making the monster as much a reader and metaphorizer as any of his transgender sympathizers. And so – contrary to Hatch's flattening of this epistemologically complicated scene into one of the monster facing some ontological truth of his body – not only are the "transparent" pool's mirror qualities in question, the whole scene can well be read as a sophisticated rhetorical scene staged by the monster to explain his coming to see himself through a social as well as a literary/cultural frame: He is not like the villagers; he is not like the literary humans that have shaped his consciousness.

The monster himself notes that his perception evolves with "increase of knowledge" and that the shades and images he glimpses appear in very unreliable (frail and inconstant) mirrors, from reflections in water to moonlit shadows:

> Increase of knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was. I cherished hope, it is true; but it vanished, when I beheld my person reflected in water, or my shadow in the moon-shine, even as that frail image and that inconstant shade (M. W. Shelley 88).

This is an instant of dysphoric knowledge: Discovering through an "increase of knowledge" what "a wretched outcast" is clearly not just about seeing the physical shape of his body – the increase of knowledge is both about beholding his body and the vanishing of hope that comes with understanding the place his embodiment occupies in the world. When we understand the monster's shame as complexly related to apprehending one's body as in and exposed to the world (changing with "increase of knowledge"), we can see how his shame resonates with the way Sheila Cavanagh writes about transgender shame:

> Shame is thus wrought by exposure (vulnerability to surveillance), by having the body revealed for all to judge. Trans-specific forms of shame emerge when one cannot conceal gaps between gender identification and the body, its contour, genitalia, and orifices *as seen* by cissexuals (Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms* 62).

In a way that speaks powerfully to the transgender person in Cavanagh's study of surveillance and exposure in sex-segregated bathrooms, Shelley's monster experiences shame because he realizes that his body is "considered unattractive," and this presents a problem for his identification with others, his positive investment in his own body, and his desire for interpersonal relationships. On all these levels, positive affective investment gets dramatically reduced (though not entirely eliminated[22]), resulting in this intense experience of shame.

The monster's shame, then, is not inherent in his "disgusting" body so much as it emerges (over and over again) in the affective experience of knowing the place of one's embodiment in the world. This has, as we shall see in chapter III, important implications for thinking about the ubiquitous transgender mirror scenes, in which what is known about bodies experientially and in the mirror is also never direct access to some ontology, but always informed by being bodies in a world of gendered and sexed meanings and expectations. Any truth claims about disgusting monsters or the gendering and sexing of bodies come into being in a world full of mirrors – or, as it were, transparent pools – that are structured to sustain certain truth claims more easily than others.

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[22] Shame, according to Tomkins, is activated precisely by the "incomplete reduction" of interest or joy (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 186).

In Hatch's view, however, affective responses are a direct route to truth, perhaps because he focuses so much on contempt-disgust. Shame and self-contempt are "intimately related" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 119) and Hatch seems (against his wording – he writes about "shame" –) to read the pool reflection scene as one of self-contempt. This focus on contempt-disgust, which we will turn to next, is a possible explanation for why Hatch, as we have seen, leaves much of what Tomkins has to offer about shame and its productivity for reading Shelley's novel underexplored. In Hatch's reading, the monster's shame is merely the monster's own version of the other character's contempt-disgust, a response that registers the "irreducible fact of how disgusting the Creature is." While collapsing shame and (self-)contempt is reductive, adding Tomkins' ideas about self-contempt is quite useful for reading the scene of the monster and his reflection.

In self-contempt, Tomkins argues, the self that feels contempt splits from the one that draws contempt, which in turn can feel shame. In other words, shame and self-contempt can be simultaneously present (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 153). It is instructive to read the monster's response to his reflection as a mix of shame and self-contempt. In particular, self-contempt appears to characterize the monster's comparison with the De Lacey's, the "cottagers," when we read it alongside Tomkins: "If the self is compared with other selves and found distasteful, the self can learn to have contempt for itself" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 258). While shame and (self-)disgust are thus somewhat different (albeit related), neither is evidence of some kind of ontological "truth" about the body/face.

For Hatch, the fact that the Creature "*is* monstrous and cannot be figured as human" (Hatch 46) is apparent in the various disgusted reactions to him and in his own mirror scene. Hatch argues that this fact finds narrative "confirmation" when Walton, one of the main narrating voices (and a stand-in for the readers' position as outsider to the main events), sees the monster:

> 'Never did I behold a vision so horrible as his face, of such loathsome, yet appalling hideousness. I shut my eyes involuntarily' (240). What has been the marker of truth for the Creature ('[H]ow was I terrified, when I viewed myself in the transparent pool! … I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am' [139]) validates the entire story as Walton becomes eye-witness (in this novel's variation where closing the eyes gives the fullest validation) (Hatch 45).

What stands between the monster and potential human community, in Hatch's view, is not the reactions of his surroundings, but his very body. Disgust is merely the effect of what is inherent in the monster's body itself: "The Creature's face is a prohibition against social connection (through the instrument of disgust)" (Hatch 44). In order for disgust to be a direct effect of the monster's body, for the monster's body to be disgusting, this affect would have to be firmly attached to the body as a certain kind of – disgusting – object. If the character's disgust is merely narrative "confirmation," then the monster's body is already imagined as ontologically pre-determined as disgusting, prior to and in fact somewhat independent of any narrative confirmation. This is quite different from the way Tomkins theorizes the freedom of object of the affect system and from how he explains disgust.

Tomkins holds that shame as "an innate auxiliary affect and a specific inhibitor of continuing interest and enjoyment" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 123) can spring from especially "idiosyncratic sources": "[T]he pluralism of desires must be matched by a pluralism of shame. […] One man's shame can always be another man's fulfillment, satiety or indifference" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 188). Shame is the social, but also the most idiosyncratic affect. Disgust, on the other hand, differs from other affects in Tomkins by being more specialized in its focus on the "intake drives,"[23] and less easily dissociable: "a more primitive type of affect-drive organization" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 129). This could be what Hatch is latching onto in taking disgust as a sort of stubborn anti-social effect of the disgusting. However, what Tomkins calls the "freedom of object of the affect system" (Tomkins, "What Are Affects?" 54), the idea that affects can attach[24] themselves to all kinds of objects, applies quite clearly also to contempt-disgust. In fact, Tomkins writes at length about "learned contempt," arguing that intense negative stimulation does not "necessarily produce disgust" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 235). If affects can follow any kind of stimulation and even intense negative stimulation does not necessarily produce disgust, then no body, no monster, is per se (and thus for every person's responding affect system) disgusting. Tomkins, then, does not actually offer Hatch a way of arguing that the monster's "face" is "a prohibition against social connection." On the contrary, Tomkins offers us a theory that contradicts Hatch's reading. The monster is not qua his body absolutely precluded from all social connection. He is certainly isolated, desperate, and rageful, and there is no doubt that his attempts at sociality fail over the course of the plot. But all this is the result of his interactions with a specific cultural and social environment, not the inevitable effect of his "disgusting" body.

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[23] "The stimuli which primarily activate disgust and nausea are those which are relevant to hunger, thirst and breathing" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 129).

[24] This formulation is perhaps misleading about the directionality and temporality of this. It must be read to be inclusive of all the possibilities: "The object may evoke the affect, or the affect find the object" (Tomkins, "What Are Affects?" 55).

Rather than taking disgust, the way Hatch does, as an inevitable effect of something disgusting, it might be more helpful to draw on some of Tomkins's examples of learned disgust in understanding the affective responses to the monster. Indeed, the novel's text itself would suggest looking for an alternative to Hatch's assumption: Far from being presented as evidently disgusting in the novel, the monster's body is described without any clear indication of what exactly it is that would separate it from human beauty standards – and how much this quality is related to his body. The doctor describes his Creature as follows:

> His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature (M. W. Shelley 34).

The narration does not give the reader a very clear description of his body or what exactly makes it disgusting within the narrative world. Doctor Frankenstein is not a very reliable narrative voice here, himself pointing out that the "feelings of human nature" are supremely changeable (and, we might add, perhaps not determined by an inherently disgusting object).

The creature's features were selected "as beautiful," with bulging muscles, lustrous hair, pearly teeth. Other features, while, in Frankenstein's description horridly contrasting this impression, such as watery eyes and black lips, only make the monster "ugly." The doctor does not find his creation abhorrent until the monster comes alive:

> I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then, but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived (M. W. Shelley 35).

Coming alive, being "capable of motion" seems to be what really turns the monster into a disgusting and horrifying sight for his creator. In fact, the doctor seems to be even more concerned with what others might think than with his own disgust: "I dreaded to behold this monster, but I feared still more that Henry should see him" (M. W. Shelley 37). If we stay close to what the novel offers us, coming alive is, arguably, where the Creature becomes disgusting. It is not a physical characteristic of the monster's body, then, that inspires disgust in the narrative, but the fact that this body goes from the 'natural' state of corpse to that of Creature, a creature created by the doctor.

Tomkins writes about learned disgust: "A special case of learned disgust at the unexpected is the disgust for the counterfeit, for the imposter, for the poor imitation" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 238). He goes on to add that one of the stimuli characteristically feeding into learned disgust responses is "any deviation of the object from any norm, from the true, the good, and the beautiful" (Tomkins, *Affect Vol.2* 240). The disgust in facing the monster as a man-made "Creature" could thus be taken, for example, as learned disgust at both/either an imitation of life, a counterfeit human being, and/or a deviation from norms of subjectivity, origin, and beauty. This interpretation of disgust in the novel through Tomkins is instructive for a transgender reading, because it speaks to Jay Prosser's explanation of "transphobia," which itself uses the Frankenstein (the monster) metaphor:

> [T]he stigmatization of transsexuals as not 'real men' and 'real women' turns on this conception of transsexuals as constructed in some more literal way than nontranssexuals – the Frankensteins of modern technology's experiments with sexual difference (Prosser, *Second Skins* 9).

If we take Raymond's work as an example, the language of "male-to-constructed female" and her surrounding argument certainly illustrate that such transphobia can be understood in Tomkins' terms of learned disgust. Raymond presents transsexuals as poor imitations, counterfeits, and imposters (hence her refusal to accord trans women any recognition as women), focused on their deviation from norms of sexed embodiment and gender of rearing (for Raymond, Daly, and certainly for the norms and assumptions that underlie sex classification at birth, only who is born and raised a woman *is* one).

Questioning how disgustingness in Hatch comes to be a naturalized, ontologized "fact" of the monster's body helps to identify a similar move in discussions of transgender bodies beyond Janice Raymond's work. Making the reaction an inherent property of the perceived body also underlies the "trans panic defense" presented by two of transgender teenager Gwen Araujo's murderers, which (although rejected by the court) "argued that deadly violence should be expected or excused if it is committed in response to the discovery of a partner's transgender status" (Szymanski). But it also permeates, for example, John Phillips' *Transgender on Screen* when he argues that

> reactions to images of transsexuality are informed at unconscious levels by the same archaic mixture of fear and fascination, eroticism and disgust, as reactions to hermaphrodites were in ancient times, while transvestism continues to be a subject for comedy (J. Phillips 49).

Much as Hatch sees Shelley's monster as necessarily provoking disgust, Phillips reads transsexual bodies as calling up disgust as part of an "archaic mixture" of reactions. “Unconscious” and “archaic” (and related to “ancient” reactions to physical sexual variation), these reactions are presented as so deeply psychologically and historically rooted as to become “facts” about the transsexual body. It is as if Phillips were writing a poorly edited undergraduate essay, in which ‘since the beginning of time, man has been disgusted by the transsexual.’ Of course, what is being naturalized here with and through this disgust is the sexual binary, which demands that gender equal sex (and sex be one of two ‘opposites’). Something like “trans panic” being presented as a ‘natural,’ excusable violent response to transgender bodies is merely an intensified version of this way of thinking.

Arnold Davidson in *The Emergence of Sexuality* discusses the history of how horror and monsters have been conceptualized in Western thought, because “when horror is coupled to monsters, we have the opportunity to study systems of thought that are concerned with the relation between the orders of morality and of nature” (Davidson 93). He argues that with the Enlightenment advent of “natural law and natural reason,” monsters, heretofore conceptualized in religious frameworks of divine prodigy and natural wonder (which were more obviously culturally specific), became “naturally horrifying:”

> Since horror came to be enmeshed in the framework of natural law and natural reason, prodigies, and the wrath of God, could be described in a way that was intended to represent the experience of every human being, not simply the experience of a culturally specific group. Objects of horror could now directly appear to be naturally horrifying.

It is in this tradition, which “conceal[s] the recognition that horror is a cultural and historical product” (Davidson 116), that “objects of horror” such as the monster in Hatch and the transsexual in the trans panic defense and in Phillips are cast as naturally horrifying.

Richardson and Page suggest that transphobia in the Black community can be traced to racialized Western norms of gendered sexualities that emerge as 'scientific' and 'natural' through this same mechanism, which conceals their cultural and historical production:

> We have shown how the colonial era's 'scientific' delineations of the Black female body as a site of sexual aberrance has served, along with historic European demands for civility, to shape Western ideas of propriety in ways that today still compel the normativity of Westernized gendered sexualities. We find curious any claim that our analysis too simplistically assumes that the attitude of gender-conforming Blacks toward Black transpeople is *solely* a reaction to White dominant standards. We have not argued solely, but we have argued that such standards do constitute a preponderant force shaping Western gender in general, Black gender in particular, and especially Black gender-conforming views of Black trans subjectivity (Richardson and Page 72).

With Davidson, we can add that such dominant standards are naturalized, in part, through the naturalization of horror as a reaction to transgressions, through the naturalization of transphobia.

Arguing against this naturalization of horror is what is at stake in transgender memoirist Thomas Page McBee's claim that it is not the monster's body that is "evil:"

> Like Victor Frankenstein's stitched vision, I am a man born of medicine. I'm not saying that I'm a monster, just that he's not, either. I see that the parallel is uneasy, that the implication is uncomfortable. But I've read that book over and over because I think it tells us something brilliant about the slippery nature of monstrosity: that the body is not ever evil; it's the mind that bends (McBee).

Confronted with similar culturally and historically specific regimes of seeing and categorization, the monster's transgender reader must reject Hatch's linear assertion that "the disgust that forms the Creature becomes authoritative, exclusive, and fatal" (Hatch 46). On the contrary, fatality is not the simple result of the concerted workings of negative affects in the novel. Disgust, in particular, is not all that "forms the Creature" – or the responses to him – and does not have to be the authoritative affect.

While the monster's claim to subjectivity, to being "a sympathetic and persuasive participant in Western culture" (Brooks 202), is traditionally attributed only to his linguistic capabilities, an affect-oriented perspective allows us to figure shame into this equation – as a relation to his own body, as a mode of relationality, and as a source of sympathy. Shame and disgust, then, work in different and at times mutually contradicting ways in the novel. Disgust is indeed the affect that poses the question of the possibility of sociality for the monster (a question that is also posed by the events of the plot!), but this is a question is more accurately addressed when disgust is understood as the other characters' (learned) response rather than a naturalized response to the monster's body. Understanding the monster as a figure of Tomkinsian shame and of failed sociality rather than as "inherently disgusting" allows us to think of the monster trope as one that negotiates questions of interior- and exteriority: The monster attempts to find language in which to wrap, to re-frame an embodiment (a relationship to a body) that the 'external' world of relationships and objects does not mirror or sustain. Viewed this way, the trope opens up a perspective on gender dysphoria not as an individual condition of an interior, insulated mind split from the body, but as emerging in a worldly experience of embodiment.[25]

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[25] Judith Butler suggests "that the outside is also inside, that what we report upon as 'interior' is a particular way in which the cultural norm takes shape as psychic reality, very often as psychic identification" (Butler, "Spirit of Revolt" 72)

Negative affects in *Frankenstein* are one way of getting at why Dr. Frankenstein and his monster have been circulating as transgender metaphors. Transphobic uses of the metaphor such as Daly and Raymond latch onto the moments of disgust in the novel, and, somewhat similar to Hatch, claim this disgust as a truth-effect of the surgically modified transgender body. Uses of the monster as a transgender trope suggest a different reading of gender dysphoria in terms of Tomkins' affect theory – as an affective response to the way the body's cultural coding does not sustain a particular gendered intersubjectivity. Monster metaphorics can then be argued to do both rhetorical and affective work, ranging from the disgust of transphobia to the shame of gender dysphoria.

Monsters "disrupt both internal and external order, and overturn the distinctions that set out the limits of the human subject" (Shildrick 4) and their transgender metaphorizations are thus very closely related to the tropes discussed in chapters III and IV – opening up the question of dysphoria as something that emerges in a worldly experience of gendered embodiment, not a (often pathologized) condition of an interior, insulated mind with a gendered essence split from a pre-discursive body. Unlike those other tropes, however, the transgender monster is the only one that is used both in transphobic diatribes and transgender autobiographies. It thus raises issues of injurious histories and the politics of reclaiming most acutely. Thomas Page McBee writes:

> I am the result of latex gloves and operating rooms, but I see the parts welded together, and I know that the difference between me and Frankenstein's monster is that I'm not a misguided ego or a cautionary tale, not a parable or an invention. Those are the sorts of stories the villagers tell (McBee).

As a metaphor of embodiment that is tied to sociality – and to the question of what makes a human – Frankenstein (the monster) is a story that the villagers tell. And, as we all know from the film, the villagers are the ones with pitchforks. But Frankenstein is also a trope of eloquent rage against those conditions, of having to speak from the position of queerly-denaturalized subjectivity, and a figure of the dysphoric knowledge that emerges from this experience of monsterized embodiment.

III. Splitting Figures: Mirrors & Ghosts

> The words that struck me were the only ones both my mother and the counselor had used: they wanted *to protect me from myself*. Abruptly up against the wall, I saw my family and society at large united only in the belief that me and myself were two different people engaged in a fight to the death. The shape of my condition would be war, a world war between myself and the image of me (Link and Raz 79).

The split that Aaron Raz Link's memoir describes as the "war between myself and the image of me" is a split of psycho-medical knowledge and claims to knowing oneself, of image and self-perception, of sex and gender attributions. The war is between "myself and the image of me," but the fact that Link calls it a "world war" and attributes the splitting not least to the beliefs of "my family and society at large," suggests that this is a split that we shouldn't think about as part of a trans ontology. Rather, as this chapter will argue, mirrors and ghosts as transgender figures of splitting and doubling are about the epistemological status and rhetorics of dysphoric knowledge. Mirror scenes split trans subjectivity through mirror models of sex and gender and ghosts metaphorize the doubling of transgender rhetorical subjects produced by breaks in temporal and pronominal coherency.

Thinking (and) the Subject: Philosophical and Lacanian Mirrors

The following section will set the scene for understanding the negotiation of subjectivity and knowledge in transgender mirror tropes by discussing the privileged role of the mirror in Western thought. The mirror here has functioned as a figure for thought itself as reflection, the making of the Cartesian subject, and its un-making as the psychoanalytic subject. All of these are important to consider in placing the mirror scene as a staple[26] feature of transgender rhetorics, because they situate the mirror as a site of knowledge production and subject formation, not a site of a mere, direct confrontation with and evaluation of an immediately accessible, unfiltered image of one's body and its meanings.

Philosopher Erin Cline, in comparing the use of the mirror metaphor "in Zhuangzi, Xunzi, Kierkegaard, and Rorty" to trace specific differences between Chinese and Western conceptualizations of the mirror, argues "that a properly contextualized comparison of different uses of a metaphor sometimes uncovers more differences than similarities between philosophical views" (Cline 337). Cline's observation that the same metaphor can work quite differently in different (philosophical) contexts suggests that for the purposes of understanding Western transgender mirror metaphors in context, we can focus on her discussion of Richard Rorty, whose rejection of the mirror metaphor outlines its central role:

> Rorty argues for the rejection of the metaphor. He maintains that the history of Western philosophy is dominated by the metaphor of the mind as a mirror, defined by the idea that the mind reflects reality: '[M]etaphors rather than statements . . . determine most of our philosophical convictions. The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations—some accurate, some not—and capable of being studied by pure, non-empirical methods. Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself.' Rorty's analysis concerns the use of the mirror metaphor in Western epistemology. He calls the mirror metaphor 'the original sin of epistemology' in the Western philosophical tradition, because epistemology has concerned itself with the accuracy of the mind. Rorty argues that Western epistemologists typically examine the mind, trying to figure out if it is reflecting reality with accuracy and clarity, like a mirror (Cline 346).

The mind as mirror, in this view, is a metaphor that is foundational for epistemological models that are based on "the assumption that the world itself is made up of clearly and distinctly knowable things" (Cline 347). Mirrors serve "as objective standards for truth" (Cline 347), as the ideal of producing the most accurate possible *reflection* of a reality that is outside and separate, but *facing* the mirror. The mirror, here, is the (in Rorty's view highly problematic) standard against which knowledge – as accurate representation of a reality independent thereof – can be measured and to which the philosophical mind is aspiring (Rorty 12). Rorty highlights the importance of metaphors to philosophical thinking – including to the idea of what knowledge is.

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[26] Mirror scenes can be found in practically all transgender autobiographical texts, with examples too numerous to cite (Cummings; Martino and Martino; D. Feinberg; Hunt; Krieger; Ladin, *Door*; Boylan, *Not There*; Khosla; Castle). Prosser rightly calls them "a convention of transsexual autobiography" (Prosser, *Second Skins* 100).

Similarly, Derrida is concerned with the mirror as a central philosophical metaphor, but, true to form, focuses on unpacking the metaphor itself. In his study on "Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection," Rodolphe Gasché draws attention to Derrida's use of the mirror even to the extent of making it the epigraph and title of his book *The Tain of the Mirror*. Gasché's book on Derrida's view of the mirror as a philosophical metaphor puts the emphasis on the emergence of the Cartesian subject. Gasché focuses on *reflection* as foundational for the idea of philosophic thinking – reflection in the way philosophic thinking became concerned with not merely the mirror ideal, but also at the moment that it turns in on itself and reflects its own capacity for reflection (Gasché argues this happens with Descartes):

> Why, then, did reflection become an outstanding, perhaps an unsurpassed, principle of philosophical thinking, and in what way are we to understand it? First of all, from the moment it became the chief methodological concept for Cartesian thought, it has signified the turning away from any straightforward consideration of objects and from the immediacy of such an experience toward a consideration of the very experience in which objects are given. Second, with such a bending back upon modalities of object perception, **reflection shows itself to mean primarily self-reflection, self-relation, self-mirroring**. [...] In giving priority to the human being's determination as a thinking being,

> **self-reflection marks the human being's rise to the rank of a subject** (Gasché 13f.) [my emphasis; AKR].

The mirror and reflection, while present in Western philosophical thought from the start (here, Gasché uses Derrida to agree with Rorty's assessment), comes to mean not just reflecting – according to an ideal of accuracy – a knowable world. It comes to reflect its own conditions of reflecting, and thus enters a new phase with Descartes, that of the self-mirroring subject: "[R]eflection is the structure and the process of an operation that, in addition to designating the action of a mirror reproducing an object, implies that mirror's mirroring itself, by which process the mirror is made to see itself" (Gasché 16f.). The mirror, here, is not just the basis of epistemology and a metaphor for the mind: "[S]ince the beginning of modern metaphysics reflection has represented the sole means by which an ego can engender itself as a subject" (Gasché 14). The mirror is the birthplace of subjectivity.

The mirror in Western philosophical debate has a long history as a standard of accuracy, as a figure of facing a knowable reality. Susan Stryker suggests that the mirror as philosophical metaphor – the "mirror theory of knowledge" – shapes what we might correspondingly call a mirror theory of sex and gender:

> In the modern base-and-superstructure epistemic paradigm, sex is considered the stable referential anchor that supports, and is made known by, the signs of gender that reflect it. This is a specific instance of what cultural critic Frederic Jameson called a "mirror theory of knowledge," in which representation consists of the reproduction for subjectivity of an objectivity assumed to lay outside it. The epistemological assertion that the material world is reflected in the mirror of representation is 'modern,' in a long historical sense, to the extent that it gained force along with the rise of scientific materialism in societies of Western European origin since the end of the fifteenth century (Stryker, "(De)Subjugated" 9).

Following the epistemological model of the mirror, sex becomes the knowable reality to be accurately reflected by gender: "Gender is simply what we call bodily sex when we see it in the mirror of representation – no questions asked, none needed" (Stryker, "(De)Subjugated" 9). This idea of gender as a mirror, this whole way of knowing cannot account for transgender phenomena, which "call into question both the stability of the material referent 'sex' and the relationship of that unstable category to the linguistic, social, and psychical categories of 'gender'" (Stryker, "(De)Subjugated" 9). It is in this context that Stryker asserts that "transgender phenomena [...] point the way to a different understanding of how bodies mean, how representation works, and what counts as legitimate knowledge" (Stryker, "(De)Subjugated" 8f.). Dysphoric knowledge as it struggles with the figure of the mirror is then not just a different knowledge claim contesting on the same epistemological grounds (another mirror with a competing standard of accuracy). It disputes the underlying mirror theory of sex and gender.

If the mirror is the birthplace of the Cartesian philosophical subject, it is also that of Lacan's psychoanalytic subject. Lacan sees "the image of the mirror [...] as that which metaphorically and literally inaugurates the accession to being-in-the-world as a subject, a singular self in a singular body" (Shildrick 105). He theorizes the "mirror stage" as a developmental moment in the formation of a subject, as the beginning of a subjection experienced as a jubilant identification:

> We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term imago.

> This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject (Lacan 2).

Lacan's lecture is woven around the core metaphor of a child seeing "himself" (Lacan uses masculine pronouns) in the mirror, for the first time. The child identifies with "his" own reflection. Given that this identification involves a displacement, a projection of the self onto the outward, spatial dimension, this encounter marks the subject's subsequent and lifelong identification of the self in terms of the Other.

The mirror, for Lacan, is a central trope that he uses to mark and explain a developmental stage. He does so in so much vivid detail that some of his readers have taken this to be the defining description of what happens in all mirror scenes. It is important, however, to bear in mind that this is not a lecture about the mirror; it is about a moment in psychic development (that, like the primal scene, does not strictly speaking have to occur as such in the life of each individual to nevertheless structure the psyche in the logic of psychoanalysis). This stage is one that is placed before the child enters into language and is inducted "in the universal" as a subject. This stage is one in which, despite the experience of a "fragmented body" (Lacan 4), the emerging subject, not yet set in its function in language, misrecognizes himself as whole, coherent, and potent. The mirror in Lacan is the site of the *misrecognition* of "the *I*" as emerging subject.

> The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up

> in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development (Lacan 4).

The mirror stage is not an internal drama of self-reflection/self-mirroring, but of anticipating and setting the stage for the assumption of the "rigid structure" of identity. What in other models is a scene of assuming an identity that is based on self-recognition, in Lacan it leads the subject into an "alienating identity." The mirror offers an all-the-more successful scene of misrecognition, because it operates under the guise of reflecting a total and knowable reality.

Instead of regarding the "ego as centered on the *perception-consciousness system,*" Lacan argues that misrecognition, *méconnaissance*, characterizes the ego (Lacan 6). In making misrecognition the central lesson of the mirror metaphor, Lacan launches a powerful attack on the philosophical subject and the mirror of knowledge. The mirror stage, Lacan writes, "is an experience that leads us to oppose any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito*" (Lacan 1). Lacan demonstrates in the mirror stage how psychoanalysis' dethroning of the ego as "master of its own house"[27] troubles both the idea of the Cartesian self-mirroring subject and the idea of the mirror as the standard of knowability and accuracy.

Among Lacan readers, there is, as Kaja Silverman describes, a debate about whether "the mirror stage should be understood metaphorically rather than literally," whether, in fact, the mirror stage is about – and requires – actual mirrors at all (Silverman 10). Silverman argues that Lacan gives the "literal reflection both a decisive role in the initial formation of the ego, and a determinative influence over the ego's subsequent development," thus foregrounding the "literal" mirror (Silverman 11). But it is important, I think, to note that while "The Mirror Stage" has such a strong hold on our theoretical responses to any mirror metaphor, there is room for debate about the degree to which there is even a non-metaphorical mirror in Lacan's model at all.

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[27] I am borrowing Freud's famous formulation that the human being is going to suffer "the third and most sensitive offence" by psychoanalysis, which intends to prove that the "ego" is not even, as this particular quote goes in German: "Herr im eigenen Haus" (Freud 284).

Similarly, there is heated debate about the stage in "The Mirror Stage"

> In his essay on primary identification, Lacan refers to the period extending from the infant's sixth to its eighteenth month as a mirror stage, but he also describes the infant's encounter with its specular reflection as more of a punctual event than an ongoing process (Silverman 15).

Either punctual or processual, this stage is originally presented as a developmental stage of the infant, though also sometimes expanded (metaphorically) to all kinds of situations involving mirrors.

The focus on the idea that the Lacanian mirror stage is "usually accompanied by pleasure" (Homer 24), that this is a scene of narcissistic misrecognition, leaves open what, if anything, this psychoanalytic mirror scene can tell us about transgender mirror scenes. Kaja Silverman aptly notes in relation to her reading of Fanon:

> Perhaps because Lacan's jubilant infant is implicitly gendered masculine, and because other 'differences' simply do not figure in his theoretical paradigm, the author of the essay on the mirror stage never suggests that there might be situations in which identification fails to provide narcissistic gratification (Silverman 20).

Despite this Lacanian silence on the kind of mirror experience transgender mirror scenes stage, the text, as "one of the most frequently anthologized and referenced of Lacan's texts" (Homer 17), is a staple reference point for any critical encounter with mirrors – including transgender ones. These rituals of canonical responses do not often yield any substantive results, however. Jay Prosser's reference to Lacan is representative of a larger trend toward invoking Lacan only to dismiss, angle, or "reverse" the scene he set. Prosser writes:

> The mirror misrepresents who I know myself *really* to be: at an angle to Lacan's mirror phase, the look in the mirror enables in the transsexual only disidentification, not a jubilant integration of the body but an anguishing shattering of the felt already formed imaginary body – that sensory body of the body 'image' (Prosser, *Second Skins* 100).

Peter Brooks makes a similar move in his discussion of Frankenstein's monster viewing himself in the transparent pool: "The Monster, on the other hand, discovers himself as different, as violation of the law, in a scenario that mirrors and reverses Lacan's" (Brooks 207f.). And Heather Love characterizes the mirror scene in *The Well of Loneliness* (which will be discussed below) by its departure from the Lacanian model:

> Stephen's confrontation with her image proves to be intensely alienating. Unlike the child in Lacan's mirror scene, Stephen does not see an image that is ideal or complete but rather one that is at odds with her desired self-image and must be 'dragged around' like a 'monstrous fetter' (Love 116).

It is suggestive, I think, that Lacan seems an obligatory detour for Love, but one that only returns us to Hall's language. These dysphoric mirror scenes of literary monsters, inverts, or transgender autobiographers (and a transsexual theorist – Prosser – inserting his own narrative into his reading of trans memoirs) are not captured in Lacan's mirror scene, figurative or literal.[28] In fact, the mirror as a figure is the only thing they have in common. The angling, reversing, and "unlike" readings indicate, however, that not every mirror scene is a Lacanian one.

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[28] Contrary to my view that Lacan offers silence or unwieldy and inappropriate tools for readings of transgender mirror scenes, psychoanalyst Patricia Gherovici argues that there is "an early case of transsexualism that was treated by Lacan not only with remarkable prudence but also with great zeal" (Gherovici 154). However, the "case" is revealed to be one of psychosis rather than of what would nowadays be described as "transsexualism" (though even the use of that term has fallen out of psychomedical favor, which Gherovici does not appear to know) and the fact that Gherovici wants to label it so (along with another one of an intersex patient, who, likewise, would

To be clear, reading transgender mirror scenes as specific is not to say that it is impossible to read all young children (transgender or otherwise) as experiencing the mirror stage as a developmental phase of misrecognizing – with pleasure – the body as whole, coherent, and potent: "The effect of this moment in one's history is to establish an investment in the bodily sense of self as unity or identity that is based on misrecognition, and on the repression of one's experience as split, fragmented, and dependent" (Elliot 140). This developmental stage, this fundamental misrecognition, is just not in the first instance one of gender – or it cannot be if we want to read transgender subjects in terms of the mirror stage. Lacan, for whom sexual difference was fundamental to subjectivity, might be turning in his grave at that formulation. But, as the following readings of transgender mirror scenes will suggest, Lacan's mirror scene does not tell us much about the trope of the transgender mirror, where subjects, who we may well consider to have been formed in the Lacanian sense, confront a splitting that is not one of psychosis or dissolution, but of gender dysphoria.

Mirrors in Memoirs

> I wasn't stupid; I recognized that this body was attached to me. However, I couldn't, for instance, see myself in mirrors (Link and Raz 138).
>
> Adolescence began to deform me. I dressed in the dark and avoided mirrors like a vampire, and for the same reason – I wasn't there in the reflection (Ladin, *Door* 27).

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not commonly be understood as a transsexual) discredits her endeavor – and with it Lacan's alleged "prudence and zeal" as an interpreter of transgender phenomena.

Like Aaron Raz Link's and Joy Ladin's, mirror scenes in transgender memoirs are often described in language of pain, avoidance, absence, and not recognizing oneself: "I wasn't there in the reflection." "I" is absent from the reflection – yet unlike for a vampire, the mirror is not a site of invisibility. There is a reflection. But this reflection is not a site of misrecognizing/birthing a coherent, powerful subject, or reflecting truth, generating knowledge that makes sense for the one reflected/reflecting – at least not in terms of gender. Instead, as the title of Mark Angelo Cummings' memoir suggests, *The Mirror Makes No Sense*.

Jay Prosser writes about these mirror scenes as scenes of splitting:

> A trope of transsexual representation, the split of the mirror captures the definitive splitting of the transsexual subject, freezes it, frames it schematically in narrative. The difference between gender and sex is conveyed in the difference between body image (projected self) and the image of the body (reflected self). For the transsexual the mirror initially reflects not-me: it distorts who I know myself to be (Prosser, *Second Skins* 100).

In keeping with this idea of splitting, transgender mirror scenes are often invoked as moments of facing one's own body as an other, of confronting the ways in which it is viewed by, or more accurately, imagined to appear to the outside world. Dhillon Khosla, for example, highlights his pre-transitional struggle with "a world where no one, including the mirror, could fully see my truth" (Khosla 11). For Prosser, mirror scenes are encounters with the difference between what he explains as the "projected self" of one's "self image" and the "reflected self" in the mirror (100). Sheila Cavanagh uses different terms for framing this split: "Trans people bear the burden of identifying with the distance between the visual imago and the sensational body – a distance that is normally disavowed by cissexuals" (Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms* 99). Arguing against this disavowal, Cavanagh instead proposes to see the difference in how the split of the mirror is negotiated as one of degree:

> The gender embodiments had by those who are trans and cissexual should be characterized not by an absolute difference in the way the visual imago and the sensational ego are psychically negotiated but rather by a difference in the degree to which each is felt to be compatible (Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms* 48).

It is surely important, as Cavanagh outlines, to keep in mind that the mirror as a tool and trope of 'reflection,' of confronting one's image, is a figure of splitting for everyone, not just "those who are trans." However, as the prominent role of transgender mirror tropes shows, the fact that "glass- and societal-mirrors are central to gender identifications – to the way they are assembled and undone" (Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms* 97) plays itself out very differently for those whose gender identifications are not sustained by the "culturally specific sex and gender systems that authorize dimorphic gender imagery" (Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms* 47). In other words, the mirror for Prosser is not where he can point to for reflections of who he knows himself to be. This distortion means he cannot lay claim to his gender in the language of the mirror theory of knowledge of sex and gender that is available to non-transgender reflections of gender. This cisgender collapsing of reflection and mirror theory of sex=gender is precisely what allows for the disavowal that Cavanagh writes about. As a difference between sensation and visual imago this trans mirror scene might appear to be only gradually different from non-trans mirror scenes, but in those the basic model of seeing sex as knowing gender is not at stake, on the contrary, it is reinforced, disavowing the contingency of sex and gender.

Of course, who Prosser's transsexuals "know" themselves to be experientially and what they see in the mirror is likewise always informed by being bodies in a world of gendered and sexed meanings and expectations. That is not to say that "who I know myself to be" is not a truth claim, or one with less value than the "truth" of the body (in the mirror). However, it does suggest that both truth claims come into being in a world full of mirrors. When Cavanagh writes that "distance from the mirror – either reflective glass or a nullifying transphobic stare – can be essential to life" (Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms* 99), she highlights both the powerful effect of gender dysphoria and the ways in which the mirror is a social as well as a physical phenomenon. Gayle Salamon offers an instructive account of the competing ways of apprehending the "body's truth" that are at stake in the mirror trope:

> What one might read from the contours of the body is something less than the truth of that body's sex, which cannot be located in an external observation of the body, but exists instead in that relation between the material and the ideal, between the perceiver and the perceived, between the material particularity of any one body and the network of forces and contexts that shape the material and the meaning of that body. The perceptual truth of the body is not necessarily what we see, and the traditional binary of sexual difference might have less purchase on the body's truth than other ways of apprehending its lived reality (Salamon, *Assuming* 62).

The intense moments of negative affect that appear in transgender memoir scenes of looks in the mirror point to the impact of discrepancies between "what we see" and the "lived reality" under a mirror model of knowledge that so powerfully privileges "what we see."

Contrasting mirror scenes of gender dysphoria with those of post-transitional "euphoria" are in many ways the 'before-and-after pictures' of transgender memoirs. Sometimes there are pictures, too, but most often there are not. But even if there are, before-and-after pictures, because of their temporal removal, do not fulfill the same function as mirror scenes, which are centered on the narrator's affective responses in narrative real-time. Aaron Raz Link's relationship to mirrors changes drastically after his transition (and moves from past to present tense):

> I can't stop looking in mirrors. I can't stop looking in mirrors because I like the way I look. I can't stop looking in mirrors because I like the way I look and it surprises me that much (Link and Raz 181).

A similarly positive response to transitional changes comes up in Zachary Nataf's description: "[W]hen gradually the changes do happen, there is euphoria" (Nataf 22). Actual 'before-and-after' pictures foreground some physical changes of transition, but those are not the focus of mirror scenes, which practically never describe any physical features. Mirror scenes, then, are not about how someone looks, they are about how they confront the way their image conveys gendered meaning – they are a gender dysphoric trope at least as much as actual instances of looking in mirrors. And it is precisely because they are about gendered meaning and the way gender is known and attributed that mirror scenes abound in transgender memoirs.

Often, mirror scenes as gender dysphoric tropes are not actual looks into mirrors at all. For instance, Eli Clare in *Exile and Pride*, writing about being taken for a boy by an artist who drew him as a kid, explains: "I felt as if I were looking in a mirror and finally seeing myself, rather than some distorted fun-house image" (Clare, *Exile & Pride* 146). Being recognized as a boy is a mirroring experience that is *unlike* actual moments of looking in mirrors reflecting "some distorted fun-house image." Clare here highlights the social character of the kinds of gendered mirroring that he desires – and the status of 'fun house' mirror scenes as points of comparison, as tropes of gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoric mirror scenes, rather than serving as rhetorical moments of physical description, stage a version of what Jay Prosser describes as the narrative character of transsexuality:

> The transsexual doesn't necessarily *look* differently gendered but by definition *feels* differently gendered from her or his birth-assigned sex. In both its medical and its autobiographical versions, the transsexual narrative depends upon an initial crediting of this feeling as generative ground (Prosser, *Second Skins* 43).

Mirror scenes establish "feeling as generative ground" over "what we see" – Although Prosser claims that this is merely "initial," these narratives can never return to/fully inhabit a mirror model of knowledge, even when they uphold the euphoria of no-longer dysphoric gendered mirroring.

Mirroring Dysphoria: Queer Negativity and Transgender Affect in *The Well of Loneliness*

> That night she stared at herself in the glass; and even as she did so she hated her body with its muscular shoulders, its small compact breasts, and its slender flanks of an athlete. All her life she must drag this body of hers like a monstrous fetter imposed on her spirit. This strangely ardent yet sterile body that must worship yet never be worshipped in return by the creature of its adoration. She longed to maim it, for it made her feel cruel; it was so white, so strong and so self-sufficient; yet withal so poor and unhappy a thing that her eyes filled with tears and her hate turned to pity. She began to grieve over it, touching her breasts with pitiful fingers, stroking her shoulders, letting her hands slip along her straight thighs--Oh, poor and most desolate body! (R. Hall 186f.)[29]

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[29] In keeping of my use of pronouns for the Creature in *Frankenstein*, I will use grammatically feminine pronouns for Stephen, the protagonist in Radclyffe Hall's novel, because those are the pronouns in the primary text. This does not mean I am taking any position on how to place Stephen's gender in a current sexological or queer communal nonce-taxonomy. Pronoun usage doesn't necessarily map onto what Bobby Noble calls the "querulous criticisms that possessively articulate Stephen's body with singular, absolute, and definitive status: either it is definitively lesbian or it is definitively transsexual" (Noble, *Masculinities* 42). While Noble uses "he" to underscore his transgender reading of the novel (Noble, *Masculinities* 39ff.), I think we can read the novel's mirror scene as a moment of dysphoric knowledge and in the context of transgender rhetorics without having to change the protagonist's pronouns.

Richard Dellamora in his biography of Radclyffe Hall writes that Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness* "has found favor among dyke and butch readers as well as among transgendered and transsexual subjects, who find in Stephen Gordon's struggles a mirror of their own" (Dellamora 2). The mirror in *The Well*, then, is double. On the one hand, there is this crucial mirror scene above, which has been at the center of much of the critical debate between lesbian and transgender readings in the last 20 years (Love 115). On the other hand, the novel itself has functioned as a metaphorical "mirror," as a particularly important critical object of 'looking at ourselves in the mirror' as "the dominant methodology in gay and especially in lesbian studies" (Love 41). As "lesbianism's most famous representation and its most infamous misrepresentation" (Prosser, *Second Skins* 136), it may seem easy to tell the story of the novel's reception in linear terms: Lesbian readings are followed by transgender ones. This story is, at least in terms of academic readers, not exactly inaccurate, but trans readings of *The Well* are as old as the novel itself. Almost as soon as it appeared in 1929, we can find evidence that Hall's description of gender non-conformity appealed to some of the first people undergoing medical transition, such as British FTM Michael Dillon, who read it in the 1930s (Shapiro 162; Rubin, *Self-Made Men* 50), and Christine Jorgensen, who read the book on her journey to Denmark for surgery in the early 1950s (Califia 21).

The Well of Loneliness is one of the books that literary scholar and queer theorist Heather Love uses to highlight the importance of attention to queer negative affect, because it "offers a meticulous account of the many outrages, failures, and disappointments that attend gender and sexual non-conformity in a homophobic world" (Love 107). Negativity abounds in the novel, such that it has also attracted other queer critics with an interest in affect, including Sara Ahmed, who reads it "as part of a genealogy of unhappy queers" (Ahmed, *Promise* 90), focusing not – as most other criticism does (Love 114) – on the protagonist Stephen's sexual and gender identity, but on the social critique of marriage and heteronormativity that the protagonist's unhappiness articulates. Because *The Well* has drawn and continues to draw so much attention from both queer and transgender theorists, Heather Love's reading of *The Well* and her discussion of Jay Prosser's interpretation can help us understand some of the differences between queer and transgender approaches to what Love calls "bad feelings." Looking at these differences as they manifest themselves in readings of *The Well* clarifies the role of negative affect in Transgender Studies and shows what mirror scenes have to tell us about dysphoric knowledge.

First, Love applauds Jay Prosser's transgender reading of the novel for countering those lesbian pride readings of Hall's book that dismiss the protagonist as representing an antiquated and 'wrong' gender-inversion model of lesbianism: "By interpreting *The Well* as, in effect, a case history, Prosser avoids reading Stephen's experience as a matter of 'false consciousness' and provides an important counterbalance to the dominant mode of response to the novel" (Love 117). So far, queer negativity and transgender attention to gender dysphoria come together in agreement. They part ways however, when Love criticizes that Prosser's

> literal interpretation of Stephen's desire to 'be a real man' blinds him to the larger place of gender in the novel. Though Stephen understands herself as castrated or physically lacking, the people around her also often understand her as

> ‘insufficiently’ castrated because she does not accede to her feminine role. Stephen’s mother seems most often outraged not by the fact of Stephen’s failure to be a man but by her overt masculinity – her failure to be a ‘normal woman.’ In taking Stephen’s self-description at face value, Prosser treats her self-description as if it were unfiltered by ideology (Love 117).

Love’s charge of literalness against Prosser’s reading is not altogether fair. Stephen is, after all, not the narrative voice of the novel (there is a 3rd person narrator), so the mix of dialogic self-description and reported thought is not the only source of description that Prosser (like Love) draws on. Moreover, taking “at face value” the description of Stephen’s mother’s emotions (who, as we shall see, is an important representative of “the people around her”) is no less “literal,” if this is what we are calling a literal, “face value” interpretation. When Laura Doan and Prosser open their edited collection of critical essays on *The Well* by noting that “Prosser proposes his as the most literal reading of the sexological invert and thus of *The Well of Lonelines”* (Doan and Prosser 22), this is merely a shorthand for Prosser’s argument that rather than following Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s 1989 example (which Prosser seems to suggest is typical of a certain kind of lesbian interpretation of *The Well*) of seeing lesbianism represented “as tragic transsexuality” (Doan and Prosser 18), so that “transsexuality” is read as a metaphor of sexual orientation, it is his contention that “*The Well* and the category of inversion are in fact key to the emergence of the transsexual – to the interlinked literal and literary construction of the transsexual” (Prosser, “Some Primitive” 130). Saying that inversion is central to the “literal” construction of the transsexual, that “the invert” is in fact a sexological category that appears in the genealogies of later categories of both sexual orientation and transgender, is by no means an assertion of literalness in the ways that Love appears to fault

Prosser for. As long as Love does not (and she doesn't) read the gender non-conformity of Stephen as a metaphor the way Gubar and Gilbert have, her reading is as "literal" as Prosser's.

In addition, it is unclear that Prosser discounts "the people around" as Love suggests. The people around Stephen can impact the way Stephen experiences gender without thereby having to be taken, in turn, as the greater authority on Stephen's gender: As Sara Ahmed reminds us, "[y]ou can be made unhappy by not being what the other wants you to be, even if you don't want to be what the other wants you to be" (Ahmed, *Promise* 96). It seems that Love sells short what gender dysphoria means for Prosser, which has everything to do with the ill-fit of external gender attribution, which would suggest that his reading does not block out the responses to Stephen's gender by the people around her (including her parents).

To understand what is going on in Love's attribution of "literalness" and the interpretation of gender dysphoria, we have to take a brief detour through Teresa De Lauretis' classic take on *The Well*. In an oft-cited chapter, De Lauretis wants to "propose a *model of perverse desire*" that uses the Freudian idiom, to "reappropriate castration and the phallus for lesbian subjectivity" (De Lauretis 111). Consequently, when she reads the mirror passage "against the grain of the novel's explicit message" to use it to, in turn, brush Freud "against the grain," she does not produce a reading of *The Well* so much as a reading of lesbian fetishism (De Lauretis 109, 112). All this reading "against the grain" results in an interpretation of the mirror scene that is autoerotic and desirous of a more feminine gender presentation:

> If she hates her naked body, it is because that body is masculine, 'so strong and so self-sufficient,' so phallic. The body she desires, not only in Angela but also auto-erotically for herself, the body she can make love to, is a feminine, female body. Paradoxically as it may seem, the 'mythic mannish lesbian' (in Esther Newton's wonderful phrase) wishes to have a feminine body, the kind of female body she desires in Angela and later in Mary – a femme's body (De Lauretis 114f.).

De Lauretis' take has no place for what otherwise is considered the basis for transgender readings of the scene: Stephen's masculine identification and gender dysphoria. Except that, since gender non-conformity and dysphoria emerge quite starkly as "the grain" she is reading against, De Lauretis has already acknowledged at the outset that they are the "explicit message of the novel."

Like Love (Love 116) and many readers of transgender memoir mirror scenes (as we have seen above), De Lauretis notes the failure of a Lacanian reading of this mirror (though for her the narcissistic reading fails to take because of Stephen's "phallic body," rather than – as in gender dysphoric readings – her female body):

> Consider, if you will this scene at the mirror as the textual reenactment of the Lacanian mirror stage […]. What Stephen sees in the mirror (the image which establishes the ego) is the image of a phallic body, which the narrator has taken pains to tell us was so from a very young age, a body Stephen's mother found 'repulsive.' This image which Stephen sees in the mirror does not accomplish 'the amorous captivation of the subject' or offer her a 'fundamentally narcissistic experience,' but on the contrary inflicts a narcissistic wound, for that phallic body, and thus the ego cannot be narcissistically loved (De Lauretis 121).

I would argue, again, that this tip of the hat to Lacan does not actually tell us anything about gender dysphoria or gender non-conformity, but at most something about the rituals of psychoanalytic criticism. What is interesting in this passage is the appearance of "Stephen's mother." It appears that we can trace Heather Love's reading of the lack of femininity in Stephen and the initially surprising privileging of Stephen's mother as somehow anchoring a less "literal" reading of the novel than Stephen's perspective (that Prosser was charged with taking too literally) to De Lauretis. In other words, Heather Love is not really privileging Stephen's mother's reading of Stephen's gender – the reference to literalness is, rather, a reference to De Lauretis' reading "against the grain." For a moment there in Love's interpretation, De Lauretis is Stephen's mother – or, to be less cryptic, Stephen's mother is a vehicle for keeping traces of De Lauretis' concerns (and with it perhaps a certain lesbian feminist heritage) alive in the otherwise potentially incompatible context of Love's gender dysphoria-oriented reading of the mirror scene.

Love thus attempts to keep in play both the bad feeling of gender dysphoria and the bad feeling of lacking femininity: "Stephen cannot steer a clear course between the masculine and the feminine: any attempt to resolve her sense of nonfit into a longing for either masculinity or femininity misses a crucial aspect of her experience" (Love 119). However, if we understand the mirror scene as crucial to this nonfit, and if "nonfit" for female-bodied, masculine attired and identifying literary characters in the early 20th century means "too masculine" (which, yes, is also in the sexual binary logic, not feminine enough), I think we can defend the ways in which this nonfit has been read as gender dysphoria – which is why I am placing *The Well's* mirror scene in this project. Gender dysphoria here is not merely the "longing for masculinity," it precisely emerges in social scenes of rejection, failure, and nonfit. Taking Stephen's masculine gender presentation 'literally' and naming the affective response to 'nonfit' gender dysphoria is not the same as "resolving" it. Nonfit does not make transmasculine gender dysphoria a desire for femininity.

In *Female Masculinity*, J. Halberstam strongly resists the idea of Stephen's "desire for femininity," reading the novel in context of "the life of Radclyffe Hall" [...]

> to call attention to the multiple and contradictory models of female masculinity produced by not only John [Hall's nickname; AKR] but also her many inverted friends and contemporaries (Halberstam, "Misfits" 145).

In so doing, Halberstam draws parallels between these models of female masculinity and what "comes to be named 'stone butch' within a lesbian vernacular in the 1950s" (Halberstam, "Misfits" 155). Halberstam reads Stephen as a stone butch and "vigorously resist[s]" De Lauretis' reading because

> it confirms the most conservative attempts to shore up the essential and historical relations between masculinity and men and it condemns masculine women once more to the pathos of male mimicry (Halberstam, "Misfits" 155).

Halberstam very forcefully points to the implications of De Lauretis' reading if we take it as a reading of female masculinity more than as a re-writing of Freud (it is probably both, but the former is surely more problematic). Heather Love praises Halberstam for avoiding "Prosser's literalism and his understanding of gender ontology in the novel" (Love 117) – which is interesting, since in many ways Halberstam's readerly strategy of drawing more on Hall and her "inverted friends and contemporaries" than on the novel is in many ways a whole lot more 'literal' in the traditional sense. I agree with Love, however, when she notes that what Halberstam accomplishes in re-framing the stone butch figure through a reading of *The Well* comes at the price of downplaying the negative affect, the strong moments of gender dysphoria, in the novel:

> While Halberstam's reading interrupts stereotyped notions about the sadness or inadequacy of the figure of the butch lesbian, it does not account for Stephen's constant and deeply felt sense of lack. [....] Halberstam's desire to affirm the

> possibility of a successful and satisfying female masculinity draws attention away from Stephen's affective and corporeal experience (Love 118).

I think Halberstam uses *The Well* for very interesting work on ideas of desire and sexual economies surrounding the stone butch,[30] but it does not give us much to work with if we are interested in attending to the negative affect, the dysphoria around the mirror scene. Prosser's and Love's readings both – but in significantly different ways – are centrally concerned with this negative affect that Halberstam deemphasizes.

Interestingly, Love footnotes her discussion of De Lauretis in a way that reveals even the mother, catalyst of the desire-for-femininity reading, to be holding a more ambivalent position: "Part of what makes Lady Anna's attitude toward Stephen so difficult in the book is that she fluctuates between a disappointed desire for Stephen as daughter and an outraged and ambivalent desire for her as son" (Love 183 Fn. 22). If even Lady Anna is not fully convinced, then Love should not be so worried: Readers do not need femininity to make Stephen's gender dysphoria socially situated rather than ontological and it is possible to read the novel *with* the grain without collapsing into some kind of dreaded 'literalness.' The mirror itself is a much more potent metaphoric negotiation of the complexities Love wants to preserve through the eyes of the mother. Rather than heralding the mother's view as a less "literal" counterweight to Stephen's claims (and Prosser's ontological reading) of gendered self-recognition (especially since the mother's view simply forces the meanings of sex onto gender), we can read the mirror metaphor precisely as a negotiation of gender as socially situated, experienced in/through the world, projected and reflected, a site of epistemological rather than ontological questions.

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[30] Halberstam's rethinking and depathologizing of the stone butch problematizes some of the orgasmic norms and sexual liberation heritage of 'sex positivity.' As such, it points to some of the avenues that Annamarie Jagose explores in *Orgasmology* (Jagose).

Reading the mirror as a scene of gender dysphoria then is not necessarily an ontological, or more 'literal' reading. Transgender theorist Bobby Noble formulates a critique of ontological readings of the mirror scene that is based on his claim that "in *The Well*, bodies are the effect of both reading and rearticulation practices" (Noble, *Masculinities* 80). Noble writes:

> The image of Stephen naked in the mirror does not reveal ontological truth but, rather, reads a kind of intersexed self that is, as I have been suggesting, an effect of invested and stabilizing reading and representational practices. Post-Butler critiques of essentialist constructions of identities and bodies posit gender as drag or parody, where identities (as the foreground) are read against the signifiable limitations of the body (as the ground). What happens if we assume a different definition of drag or parody, where the body itself is the performance, the foreground, the thing dragged beyond identity, and that functions as the ground? [...] In other words, what makes it possible to hear 'drag' and think 'cross-gender performance' and not 'corporeal instabilities'? (Noble, *Masculinities* 85)

I agree with the opening of this passage that the mirror does not reveal ontological truth. But Noble uses the term "intersexed self" without explaining what this means in relation to intersex as an umbrella term for bodies at odds with the sexual binary in ways that are distinct from transgender, even if they sometimes overlap. It is unclear why "intersexed" makes an appearance here, especially when reading and representational practices are at issue. My disagreement grows when Noble takes performativity for performance and with a particularly ironic twist to this popular confusion/misreading (see below, chapter IV) then suggests something that sounds very much like Butler's actual concept of performativity in *Gender Trouble* as his solution. Whether we think drag was a well-chosen example or not, the "corporeal instabilities" of sex and the problematizing of the foreground/ground binary of gender/sex model were the very point of Butler’s intervention. I share these (disavowed/misrecognized in Noble) Butlerian views and I am arguing that Noble’s claim that Stephen “attempts to articulate a body that remains stubbornly inarticulate” (Noble, *Masculinities* 56) in the mirror scene dovetails nicely with the idea of the tropes of trans rhetorics emerging in moments of being forced to articulate affective knowledge claims without language that would render it valid. But Noble, like Love, might be too quick to dismiss Prosser’s serious attention to gender dysphoria:

> When Prosser reads Stephen reading and hating his body as female, I find Stephen reading this body as male. [...] What Stephen grieves, therefore, is not so much the “inadequate,” or “incomplete,” female body but the fiction that his is a female body at all (Noble, *Masculinities* 86).

There is surely a difference between “hating his body as female” and “grieving the fiction that his is a female body at all” (and it is precisely the difference between an ontological and a more epistemological take on gender dysphoric mirror scenes). But perhaps this is an overstated contrast, since reading the body as male is arguably just a more ‘literal’ take on what Prosser calls the projected self. There is a reading of the body as male in Prosser’s contrast between projected and reflected self, too. If the term dysphoric knowledge is useful, it is precisely in pointing to the fact that “reading and hating” is a complex epistemological operation, which – as Noble himself argues about *The Well*’s mirror scene – is not easily articulated.

So, if “literalness” at most distinguishes everyone else from De Lauretis, not Love from Prosser (or either from Halberstam or Noble), why does Love use it the way she does? I am arguing that what makes Love set herself apart from

Prosser's reading is not his "literalness" so much as the different stakes that queer negativity and transgender approaches have regarding gender dysphoria and negative affect more broadly. Love faults Prosser for "assimilating" the protagonist's story to "a redemptive narrative that, through means of the modern technology of sexual reassignment surgery, solves her problem in the present" (Love 118f.). For Love, by contrast, "Stephen is beyond the reach of such redemptive narratives" (Love 119). It is not clear that by allegedly "solving Stephen's problem in the present," Prosser takes away from the failure and negativity in the novel. I fail to see the complete redemption Love suggests. Emphasizing that it is "the life-plot rather than actual somatic sex change that symptomizes the transsexual" (Prosser, *Second Skins* 158), Prosser (while mentioning Stephen's desire to "maim [...] suggests the transsexual's desire to rectify this entrapment with surgical reconstruction" (Prosser, "Some Primitive" 138) is not centrally focused on any surgical concerns in his reading of *The Well* – Even though Love appears to claim this as his underlying concern and the means (and, for her, problem) of his supposedly redeeming narrative. Granted, in an avowed transgender or transsexual (to stick explicitly with this surgical attribution) reading, Stephen is no longer a failed/-ing lesbian and attention in some ways (if we want to grant Love's point for the sake of the argument) might be diverted from how Stephen fails at female gender normativity, too. But since the novel is not in the present (and arguably even if it were), gender dysphoria, shame, and failed sociality persist and cannot be written out of the plot. This suggests that Love's resistance to Prosser's reading is more indicative of a larger problem between queer and trans negativity than a disagreement on the level of the novel.

It seems what Love is actually articulating is a resistance to trans surgery as “a redemptive narrative”, because for gender dysphoria to neatly fit into her conceptualization of queer negativity, it must be beyond even any attempt at ‘solving.’ The problem, then, is not so much what kinds of failure [or what kinds of queer/lesbian/inverted/ gender categories] one foregrounds in one’s reading of *The Well* in all its unwaveringly melodramatic pathos. Rather, the problem is that transgender readings can acknowledge “lack and pain” (Love 118) such as Stephen’s, but must take seriously gendered claims (like wanting to “be a real man”) that cannot be folded back into negativity. For Love, by contrast, gender dysphoria is to be read only within the context of queer negativity – and as such, she does not want to see it resolved into an experience of embodiment that might be changed or alleviated by any “redemptive narrative” of surgery (or medical transitioning more generally). In short, Love would like to have the gender dysphoric experience of “nonfitting” not exceed its role as one of the markers of queer negativity, while transgender readings see it as a claim to gender that gestures forward as well as backward.

To situate this divergence of transgender and queer readings of negativity, we have to situate Love’s work in this broader strand of queer thought. Questions of queer experiences of loss, social failure, antisociality, trauma, and “bad feelings” have been informing a significant strand of queer thought, of which Love’s book that contains her chapter on *The Well* is only one example. Love’s 2007 book traces “a tradition of queer experience and representation” that she calls, like the book, *Feeling Backward*. This backwardness encompasses "feelings such as nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, ressentiment, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness" (Love 4), which Love analyzes in her readings of a set of literary texts and the responses "they inspire in contemporary critics" (Love 8). She questions the politics of gay pride, arguing that "shame lives on in pride," and suggests we need to "keep our gaze directed toward the past, toward the bad old days before Stonewall" (Love 28). Backward feelings, Love claims, "serve as an index to the ruined state of the social world; they indicate continuities between the bad gay past and the present; and they show up the inadequacy of queer narratives of progress" (Love 27). Her concern with stigma, social failure, and the pitfalls of queer progress narratives initially suggests a close affinity of Love's version of queer negativity with that of Lee Edelman.

Edelman is the main proponent of what is often called the "antisocial" strand of queer negativity for holding that "queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure" (Edelman 3). Edelman calls for the acceptance, the embracing of that status, because those "inhabiting the place of the queer" can only "cast off that queerness and enter the properly political sphere" by shifting the burden to someone else: "The structural position of queerness, after all, and the need to fill it remain" (Edelman 27). For Edelman, queerness names the outside of what he calls the "reproductive futurism" of all politics and is identified with "the negativity of [the death] drive." His resultant

Lacanian call to antisocial jouissance leads Heather Love to distance herself from Edelman’s approach, because she declares herself to be more interested “in instances of ruined or failed sociality” than in accounts of it as “antisocial” (Love 22), and “more interested in the turn to the past than I am in the refusal of the future itself” (Love 23). Indeed, Love is ultimately clearly concerned with “transformative politics” and a future that can embrace backwardness (Love 163). This puts her closer to the ‘affect’ rather than the ‘antisocial’ strand of queer theory’s turn to negativity, a strand that also includes, among quite a few others, Sara Ahmed’s critique of happiness, whose “face looks rather like the face of privilege” (Ahmed, *Promise* 11), which, as mentioned before, likewise mines *The Well* for material.

Unlike in Queer Theory, where strands of negativity often explicitly set themselves apart from what Love calls “the affirmative turn in queer studies” (Love 4), from the politics of pride, “bad feelings” – gender dysphoric ones in particular – have figured strongly in Transgender Studies from the beginning. Centrally concerned with those often labeled “as gender failures (gender-confused or disoriented, gender-misidentified, gender-disordered or a gender aberration, and gender-dysphoric)” (Cromwell 24), Transgender Studies is full of discussions of failure, rage, dysphoria, and shame. Negativity and failure are so central that even Jay Prosser, one of the most articulate cultural studies proponents of a (medical) model of transsexuality that offers surgical “gender realness” as a cure to gender dysphoria, would come back to revise the thesis of his first book and move from a model of photographic and surgical referentiality to one of inevitable failure: “Gender reassignment surgery fails most obviously in the case of female-to-male transsexual reassignment, which has found no way, half a century after its invention, of reproducing a functioning penis" (Prosser, *Light* 172). But not only is there a failure of surgical technique, this failure for Prosser in his retraction becomes symbolic of a constitutive failure: "This failure to be real is the transsexual real" (Prosser, *Light* 172). And so it is a resilient and stubborn, rather than a defeatist or desperate kind of failure: "in spite of the fact that transsexuality is impossible this in no way prevents it from existing. Indeed, as with self-criticism, a similarly impossible undertaking, I would do it over again" (Prosser, *Light* 179). Impossible (according to the way gender and bodies are supposed to relate and be related, to be known and claimed), but in no way prevented from existing, is an apt description of the kinds of contradictions that characterize dysphoric knowledge, as we will see below.

Queer variations on the theme of negativity, such as Heather Love's on feeling backward, offer more opportunity for dialogue and overlap with Transgender Studies than gay pride approaches in which gender dysphoria and bad feelings get relegated to a pre-Stonewall past that is to be forgotten and overcome, or than antisocial approaches for whom failed sociality is occasion for celebration,[31] and for whom negativity is political rather than affective. Transgender Studies must take negativity seriously, not as a condemned element of a past, but as an important (whether constitutive or not) (re)current register of transgender affect. Transgender positions thus certainly agree with Love that a pride approach “does not address the marginal situation of queers who experience the stigma of poverty, racism, AIDS, gender dysphoria, disability, immigration, and sexism” (Love 147). As a closer look at Love’s reading of *The Well* reveals, however, there are differences between the way queer approaches such as Love’s and the way transgender perspectives understand gender dysphoria.

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[31] Sarah Ahmed suggests that the ways in which such positions sometimes sound like a celebratory reveling in shame are not coincidental. If Heather Love teaches us that shame lives on in pride, then Ahmed reminds us that pride lives on in embracing shame: "To embrace or affirm the experience of shame, for instance, sounds very much like taking a pride in one's shame - a conversion of bad feeling into good feeling" (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 174).

Transgender readings have to be able to account for desires and practices of alleviating the pain of bad feelings, in other words they cannot completely dismiss the redemptive narrative, the cure, the futurity of pride. Neither pride, a narrative of overcoming and dismissing negativity, nor a complete embrace of either one’s antisocial abjection (Edelman) or “living with injury – not fixing it” (Love 4) are ultimately useful options for Transgender Studies. Its allegiances to a broad range of gender diversity mean that it has to attend to “a gender dysphoric shame […] that has rightly been described as ‘existential’” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 179) and for which “sex reassignment does make all the difference” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 203), to less completely redemptive approaches such as Eva Hayward’s inviting of the surgical “cut that leaves sex-scars and other unfulfilled wishes so that I might live differently my gender dys-phoria, my dis-comforting born-sex” (Hayward, “More Lessons” 71), as well as to modes of “living with injury” – it must, in other words, be able to think both gendered passing and failure as the basis of its politics and theorizing. Gendered passing and failure are anticipated, feared, negotiated in mirror scenes, where, as the memoir mirror scenes suggested above, one encounters one’s body as seen by the outside world, or more accurately, positions oneself in the imaginary eyes of a –

right-left inverted – outside viewer.

There is much to be learned from how *Feeling Backward* foregrounds negative affect and failed sociality. Love astutely notes, for instance that “we do not have at the ready a critical vocabulary for describing the destitutions and embarrassments of queer existence. Yet *The Well* itself offers a stunningly rich and detailed account of such experiences” (Love 107). *The Well* does so, it seems to me, on two levels: There is the one that Ahmed writes about, the level of the plot, i.e. the “unhappiness” of lesbian desire and of “what it felt like to bear a newly public and newly stigmatized identity in the 1920s” (Love 26). And then there is the level of gender non-conformity, the level of transmasculine gender presentation and mirror scenes. Love combines these two when she writes about Stephen with “her avowed desire to be a man, her powerful gender dysphoria, and her romantic failure” (Love 114). We can read the mirror scene as a moment centrally concerned with the lack of “vocabulary” related to describing experiences of the former – as an instant of a recurrent element of transgender rhetorics. Reading *The Well*’s mirror scene in the context of the long history of transgender mirror scenes requires that we attend to the specificities of gender dysphoria differently than Love does. The mirror scene is, from the perspective of my project, not just one more part of a “detailed account of” queer negative affect and failed sociality. It is also about dysphoric knowledge produced at the rhetorical impasse of having to fit transgender experience into – impossible – mirror models of knowledge and gender.

Reading *The Well* in terms of knowledge is not a new idea. Bobby Noble, for instance, claims that “self-knowledge becomes one of the thematic problems of the novel" (Noble, *Masculinities* 55). Instead of coming out, Stephen "'comes in' to knowledge regimes" and "has to find a way to articulate himself through the same discourses that have enunciated him in order to rearticulate what the sexologists cannot yet fully know" (Noble, *Masculinities* 56). While starting out with a helpful placing of Stephen in relationship to sexological discourse, this passage ends in a somewhat straightforward progress narrative of sexological categories, in which transgender is something sexologists "cannot yet fully know." The "yet" reveals a rather confident model of progressive knowledge production. Presumably, sexology can fully know and articulate Stephen's "knowledges from within," Stephen's dysphoria and gender identifications, at some later point in time. Noble's confident use of masculine gender pronouns might suggest that this later point in time has arrived, that the 21st century reader can fully know, that knowing Stephen as a transman means to fully know. Sticking with the gender dysphoria of the novel without resolving it into a future of a more accurate interpellation, and recognizing that there doesn't seem to have emerged a language in which contemporary writers find their experiences more fully known, in which self-recognition can be successful, I am arguing that *The Well*'s mirror scene is precisely about the position of having to articulate gendered knowledge claims in a discursive framework that renders them not unintelligible so much as invalid.

In her study of *English Literary Sexology*, Heike Bauer reads *The Well* as Radclyffe Hall's own version of sexology, as reconfiguring "the subject's experiential reality to produce a visible new sexual subject: the outspoken female invert":

> Hall's claim for sexual authority that is rooted in personal circumstance explicitly challenges the existing exclusive male scientific sphere of the *scientia sexualis*. This was crucial at a time when the female same-sex subject had little public voice (Bauer 119).

For Bauer, Stephen's "self-recognition" is an interplay between the "discovery of sexological knowledge" (which her father had hidden from her) (Bauer 123) and the account of her own experience (Bauer 122). Bauer's reading is instructive for my purpose here not so much because of its take on "the politics of sexual epistemologies" – the authority or male dominance of sexology, specifically – but because it draws attention to the account of Stephen's experiences of gender (dysphoria) as *knowledge* claims. It is important to note that while Stephen is aware of and interacts with sexology, the language that is used to describe Stephen's experiences of gender and embodiment is not merely a repetition or exemplification of the language of sexology. Instead, the novel uses many of the tropes so rampant in transgender rhetorics (the monster, the mirror, clothes/nakedness). If we see it as part of an archive of dysphoric knowledge, *The Well* offers more than the case study that Prosser sees in it or the creation of "an outspoken female invert" that Bauer discerns. While Bauer reads Hall's as a "claim for sexual authority," a claim about who (men, women, inverts) gets to speak the language of sexology, I suggest that placed in context of transgender rhetorics, the fact that this claim is "rooted in personal circumstance" makes it an epistemological claim about the status of affective knowledge and about the rhetorical (im-)possibilities of describing experiences of gender non-conformity at all – in and beyond the language of sexology.

Bauer writes that "although phenomenology plays a role for Stephen's self-recognition, she can only fully understand the social implications of her desire after she discovers the theories that exist to describe it" (Bauer 122). I would suggest instead that "phenomenology," the experiential account of her desire, is constituted by the social implications already, and discovering "the theories that exist to describe it" might label or diagnose, but does not actually appear to give much language to the account of either the social implications or the situated experience of Stephen's desire and embodiment. What is at the center of *The Well* is then not so much "self-recognition" and its match or mis-match with (future) sexology as its narration – a narration within the context of sexology, but also within a broader context of gender, sexuality, class, and empire, and a narration that takes recourse to a gender dysphoric mirror scene, a scene in which the limits of gendered "self-recognition" come to the fore.

Jay Prosser, on the other hand, wants to mine Hall's novel, sexological case histories, and autobiographical accounts for "the subject's own words," of successful self-recognition (a self-recognition that goes beyond even the interplay with sexology that Bauer is concerned with) – as grounds of transsexual ontological claims:

> In the contemporary reception of sexology in conjunction with the poststructuralist suspicion toward narrative – particularly autobiographical narrative, which has become indistinguishable from fiction – the subject's speech in the sexological case history, its difference, has been devalued; it has not been recognized by Foucault and his acolytes who have underestimated the subject's speech in order to emphasize construction. Such autobiographies in their very difference produce patterns, certain kinds of distinguishing tropes, and indeed a different *genre* of transgendered narrative emerges even when (especially when) told in the subjects' own words. This genre of different kind of story remains remarkably consistent even up to that of today's transsexuals and its narrative patterns share much with Stephen in *The Well* (Prosser, "Some Primitive" 132).

It is important to highlight that, while these patterns and tropes are at the heart of my project, I disagree with the false alternative Prosser sets up between valuing the "subject's speech" – as somehow grounding an ontology, fixing a transgender narrative as the truth of transsexuality's difference – and "construction." The "subject's speech" is not separate from "construction," even though Prosser has a point (minus the collapsing of Foucault and his readers and the derisive language of acolytes) that insisting on "construction" would be (equally!) wrong to reduce the "subject's speech" to, for instance, mere repetition of sexological discourse. Focusing on transgender rhetorics, on the patterns and tropes, on the "speech" rather than on the "subject" keeps some of Prosser's concerns alive without having to fall behind Foucault's sophisticated insights into the trappings of identity and power/knowledge. Judith Butler takes a position that is helpful in recognizing the false binary between inside and outside, "subject's speech" and "construction":

> It would be one thing to say that the pain that arrives with gender comes from the outside, from cultural norms that surround this bounded being and then find their way inside through various mechanisms of incorporation or internalization. I want to dispute this view, only because it seems to me that the "I" who would reflect upon itself and endeavor to come to terms with gender categories in the course of that reflection, is already constituted by cultural norms which, it turns out, are at the same time outside and inside. Or perhaps better put: the cultural norms provide various gender frames that negotiate the question of the boundary between inside and outside (Butler, "Spirit of Revolt" 76).

While Butler is perhaps a poster child of what Prosser is arguing against, I am suggesting that her position is ultimately not irreconcilable with paying attention to transgender rhetorics at all. Acknowledging the cultural norms that constitute any subject's claim to gender does not mean that there is no point in paying attention to the "subject's speech," to what the "'I' who would reflect upon itself" says. After all, Butler comes to the above passage as part of her discussion of a transgender woman's poem at an open-mic, in which Butler asks

> how are we to understand the mix of pain and rage and even poetry that emerges in the midst of a normative gendered field of abyssal nonrecognition and misrecognition that parcels out pathology and options for normalization as part of its daily menu? (Butler, "Spirit of Revolt" 78)

With this mix of pain, rage, and poetry, Butler points to what my project attempts to carve out under the term *dysphoric knowledge*, the notion that "poetry," and recurrent metaphors in particular, are precisely how transgender comes to articulate its affectively charged experience of difference in the "normative gendered field." This knowledge, emerging as pain, rage, and poetry, is neither its own counter-sexology, nor a case history that adds the "outspoken female invert," nor a mere repetition of some kind of sexologically-brain-washed false consciousness.

The mirror is a trope in which the problem of recognition and self-recognition splits itself open between reflection and reflected. If the mirror is the privileged site of questions of knowledge and epistemology, if it is where the Western philosophical subject is born and disavows its split, but where the transsexual is split from mirror model claims to gender, then it is unsurprising that it becomes the site of the *dysphoric knowledge* of how the conflicting demands of gender norms, experiential accounts, and gendering looking relations render transsexuality simultaneously "impossible" and – very much – "existing."

Transgender Ghosts

When Beth Elliott first published her 1996 memoir *Mirrors: Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual*, she did so as "Geri Nettick with Beth Elliott," splitting herself into as-told-to writer and telling memoirist, becoming, in essence, her own kind of ghost writer (it took until the 2011 re-issue of the book to officially clarify that Geri was the ghost). Like so many transgender mirror scenes, Elliott's mirror of autobiography (with its mirror trope title) negotiates the splitting/doubling effects of gender norms and (self-)reflection. But in publishing as her own ghost writer, in writing in a single narrative voice that was at the same time filtered and split through this ghost, Elliott also offers a powerful example of the ghosts and hauntings that appear frequently in autobiographical and scholarly texts by transgender authors. While they are closely related to and sometimes directly appear in mirror scenes, these ghosts shift the focus from questions of recognition and reflection to questions of narrative coherence. This section will argue that transgender ghosts are figures that appear in narratives of transition in particular, because they negotiate the splitting effects of pronouns and temporalities on transgender rhetorics.

Joy Ladin, poet and professor of English at Yeshiva University's Stern College, and writer Christine Benvenuto both published memoirs in 2012. The two books share more than a genre connection; they are the result of estranged relations. Benvenuto, who used to be married to Ladin, tells "the story of the bereft spouse who loses her marriage and her husband, the present she enjoyed, and the future she imagined" (Benvenuto 4). In some ways, the two books appear to be the final round of what Benvenuto describes as a struggle of metaphors:

> In mounting desperation, I came up with one metaphor after another to describe his dilemma and the alternative ways I proposed he think about it, as if I had found myself in a game of Extreme Writers Workshop and the stakes were my marriage and family. As if I needed only to find the right words, the right image, to convince him to go on living as a man. He countered with his own metaphors, trying to convince me that he could not (Benvenuto 50).

Rather than reading Benvenuto's memoir as a narrative of marital dissolution and withheld gendered recognition in stark contrast to Ladin's as one of transgender "rebirth," I would like to draw attention to them precisely insofar as they are both engaged in a high-stakes endeavor of metaphorizing. As it turns out, the one metaphor they have in common is the ghost.

Ladin introduces the trope like this:

> At a stage in life – middle age – when many face the facts of mortality, I am experiencing rebirth – or at least, re-adolescence. This perhaps is only fair, since I spent so much of my life as a ghost, haunting a body that didn't feel like mine. Rather than embodying my identity, my body erased me, proved that I didn't, couldn't, exist. Now, every day, my body and I move closer toward belonging to each other (Ladin, *Door* 4).

Ladin's description of her previous "life as a ghost, haunting a body that didn't feel like mine" uses the figure of the ghost to refer to a kind of "pretransition (dis)embodiment" (Prosser, *Second Skins* 69). Neither this idea of ghostliness, nor Ladin's "rebirth" sit well with Benvenuto, for whom this narrative is a painful rewriting of her own story:

> He said the person I had loved for so many years was not him. In fact, he never existed at all. Erasing his own past, he rewrote the whole of my adult life as a love affair with a phantom (Benvenuto 3f.).

Benvenuto resists this "erasing" of the past and struggles with the idea of the "phantom." But she also writes that she found herself "confronted with a stranger" (Benvenuto 9) and, in hindsight, had been "living a kind of half-life" (Benvenuto 42) in her marriage, and the half-ness appears to be related to a certain kind of dis-embodiment on the part of her spouse. And so while she resists the loss of the narrative of her past and the loss of pronouns and relational terms she feels entitled to, Benvenuto's narrative ultimately joins Ladin in the use of ghostly metaphors.

Benvenuto's fight against having a familiar family history erased is itself enacting a silencing erasure. In his piece "Tracing a Ghostly Memory in My Throat: Reflections on Ftm Feminist Voice and Agency," C. Jacob Hale writes about "silencing techniques" that reinscribe his words as a trans man into nontranssexual discourses (Hale, "Tracing a Ghostly Memory in My Throat: Reflections of Ftm Feminist Voice and Agency" 50), erasing his specific position and history vis-à-vis both manhood and feminism (Hale, "Tracing a Ghostly Memory in My Throat: Reflections of Ftm Feminist Voice and Agency" 45). After a conference presentation,

> a feminist philosopher told me that now that I was a man I seemed all too ready to take up too much verbal space. With no more than a modification in tense – 'Because you used to be a man' – the same rhetorical device could have been used equally well to erase the words of an mtf transsexual speaking from her mtf transsexual subject position. In both cases, our transsexual subject positions are reduced to nontranssexual manhood in an explanatory and dismissive scheme in which the complex specificities of our transsexual subject positions are folded into nontranssexual paradigms. It is not that ftms and mtfs bear no relationship to masculinity, manliness, or manhood; of course we do. Rather, my point is that these relationships are complicatedly different from those had by nontranssexual men, so simple assimilations of our words to paradigms of nontranssexual manhood function to erase the specificities of our subject positions (Hale, "Tracing a Ghostly Memory in My Throat: Reflections of Ftm Feminist Voice and Agency" 52).

The kind of erasure that Hale describes is very openly at work in much of Benvenuto's narrative. She puts Ladin in the role of failed, egotistical husband and bad father – and so lashing out at her ex-spouse becomes, in Benvenuto's words, grounded in "feminism" (Benvenuto 88), which leads her to be surprised and outraged by other feminists' positive reception of Ladin (Benvenuto 62). In some ways, Benvenuto goes beyond the erasure Hale analyzes: It is not just that Ladin's words become that of nontranssexual manhood, it is also that this nontranssexual manhood fails, in part, precisely insofar as it is transsexual. There are individual moments of parenting that Benvenuto takes issue with, but mostly and most grievously, what's presented as Ladin's failure as husband and father is transitioning and living, often for Benvenuto this appears to mean dressing and expecting to be addressed, as a woman. So, when Benvenuto describes her former partner as "a silent, ghostly presence" at their son's Bar Mitzvah (Benvenuto 120), this is, in part, the result of the erasure and ghosting that Benvenuto herself is exacting through her refusal of recognizing Ladin's transgender position.

There is, then, the ghost as a figure of pre-transition disembodiment in Ladin and the ghostly presence of the silenced transgender woman in Benvenuto. While these two uses of the ghost figure attribute ghostliness to different moments in Ladin's and the family's history, they both negotiate the problem of how to figure transition, when it should be either impossible or unnecessary, because gender is supposed to be known and embodied as an identity, as a fixed, coherent, and stable ground that does not have a before and after. Ladin retuns to the issue of transgender temporality toward the end of her memoir, when she writes about a trip to the house she grew up in, culminating in seeing the boy she used to be in the window:

> There *he* was. My God, he was still there. 'Do you mind if I get out?' I asked, voice shaking a little. My mother kept the motor running as I stood on the sidewalk, gazing up at him, the boy I had been. I could see him there, behind the window, hurting himself over and over. All these years, he had been there, hurting, waiting for me. 'You can stop now,' I whispered to him. 'I told you I would come back to you, and I have.' [...] I felt him lift his head, and, as his hazel, time-blinded eyes turned in my direction, I heard the silence, the silence of God, smiling with satisfaction, laughing silently at our astonishment that both of us, the past and the future, the tortured boy and the woman he thought he would never be, had been answered by a single moment (Ladin, *Door* 186).

On the one hand, this is a scene of narrative resolution, a single moment invoking ideas of reunion. On the other hand, this reunion between "tortured boy" and "the woman he thought he would never be," between the past and the future, inhabits a profoundly ghostly temporality, of course. She is either meeting the ghost of her past or he is meeting the ghost of his future – or, rather, there is God to help us understand this as a moment extending in both directions at once, meaning they are both ghosts and both real, but we have little in terms of pronouns and grammar to put that in a sentence.

This problem of pronouns, temporality, and narrative cohesion is captured in the subtitle for Joy Ladin's article in the Jewish Feminist magazine Lilith: "A transgendered woman remembers his painful search" (Ladin, "What Was" 16). The masculine pronoun here is either *ghastly*, an oversight, an unintentional or ironic premonition of the way that Benvenuto wields the male pronoun across all of relational time and space, for the history, the present, and the future, as if she had won custody of her ex-spouse's gender pronoun in the divorce proceedings; or, and as a reading this makes more sense, the masculine pronoun is *ghostly*, an appearance of the memory and its complexity and contradictions in the very sentence that announces its remembering.

Moving from ghost to rebirth, as Ladin does in my epigraph, implies another term in the metaphoric field that would signify the split between ghostly existence and rebirth, as well as the progression, the movement from one to the other. In the introduction to the first of several volumes of poetry that have appeared since her transition, Ladin acknowledges her use of extensive death imagery for her own experience of transitioning: "Many of [the poems] are also about death, because, like most transsexuals, in order to be born, I first had to die" (Ladin, *Transmigration* xi). And, indeed, the book features poems with titles such as “Feeding the Corpse” (Ladin, *Transmigration* 46) and her latest collection, *The Definition of Joy*, includes “RIP Dude,” a poem dedicated to her other, supposed to be resting-in-peace, dates of birth and death featuring self, “JL, 1961-2007,” who died when giving up the “pretense of being a ghost” (Ladin, *Joy* 61). On the one hand, JL pretended to be a “ghost”, because of feeling alienated from a masculine gendered existence, on the other hand, Ladin’s former name and gender are now a history that continues to haunt her, ghost-like – RIP is, in no small part, a plea to rest in peace.

The effects of this haunting are explored in the middle volume of Ladin’s transition-themed poetry trilogy, *Coming to Life*. The poem “Growing Pain” is split in two parts, a letter from the future to the past and a letter from the past to the future. It is easy to see how these two perspectives and their split in the poem parallel the scene at the end of Ladin’s memoir in which future and past meet at the window. But rather than the memoir’s moment of reunification, of an encounter that heals the split, the poem stages the implications of a continuous haunting. The first part, “Future to Past,” contains a section that is especially interesting in relation to the question of temporality and speaking position:

> Wherever you are I cease to be.
> Wherever a trace of you peeps through
> the prostheses of flesh and fabric
> that enable me to speak
> in my uniquely subjunctive mode,
> in which ‘I’ refers
> to a speaker who has never existed -
> first person presumptive? projective? delusional? -
> the life of me collapses. The creature beneath -
> is it me? Is it you? – […] (Ladin, *Coming to Life* 5).

The traces that “peep through” haunt the speaker in this poem, and what results is a speaking position characterized by the “uniquely subjunctive mode” of “the first person presumptive? projective? delusional?" And while – to any good deconstructionist – arguably all first person language is the first person presumptive or projective, the particular transgender speaking position Ladin is writing about here is more *apparently* so. There is a ghost appearing in the first person; the first person is haunted.

This haunted/ghostly first person is precisely what Jacob Hale characterizes as a linguistic transgender problem:

> The linguistic problem is deeper than temporality: representations of me as a *stably* gendered girl child (or boy child) or as a stably gendered adult man (or adult woman) would all be false. Structurally, insertion into language – therefore, into social ontology – requires gendered stability both over time and at any given time that some of us lack (Hale, "Tracing a Ghostly Memory in My Throat: Reflections of Ftm Feminist Voice and Agency" 53).

When Benvenuto angrily tells the story of the spouse "[w]ho loses her past" (Benvenuto 4), her rage stems in part from finding herself in relation to the ghostly temporality of transitioning, from the loss of being able to insert "into language" and "social ontology" *her* past, her cherished relational position as heterosexual wife. For Benvenuto, her past is haunted by Ladin's transgender presence and present. Hale's noting that "gendered stability" is required is not a Prosser-like call for recognizing a "subject's speech" as providing stable ontological ground, or a nod to Benvenuto that it is possible to be on the right side of these representations if only by refusing to move (so that "husband" remains a stable gender category overriding all other events or narratives). Hale rather highlights how the logics of representation, which are highly contingent, structurally disallow a space for the transgender "first person" to enter. The impact of this is often tracked in transgender ghost figures, which chronicle how this "first person" is rendered "presumptive? projective? delusional?" by the framework of gendered intelligibility that Hale describes.

Ladin's visit to her childhood home shares some striking similarities with parts of Jennifer Finney Boylan's second transgender memoir, *I'm Looking Through You: Growing Up Haunted*, published in 2008. Boylan, an English professor and novelist, published this book after the Oprah-Winfrey-show-appearance level of success of her 2003 memoir *She's Not There*.[32] In her first memoir, Boylan explains that transsexuality "is a *fact*. It is the dilemma of the transsexual, though, that it is a fact that cannot possibly be understood without imagination" (Boylan, *Not There* 22). It is a fact, we might say, that requires metaphors, because it is not sustained in the language of the 'facts of life.' It is not known through the same kinds of evidence and truth claims that the sexual binary accords gender-normative identification. Her sense that she is a woman is an "invisible" burden of knowledge for teenage Boylan:

> Of course, knowing with such absolute certainty something that appeared to be both absurd and untrue made me, as we said in Pennsylvania, kind of *mental*. It was an absurdity I carried everywhere, a crushing burden, which was, simultaneously, invisible (Boylan, *Not There* 22).

Crushing, invisible, and everywhere, this knowing very much sounds like haunting. The implicit ghost here figures the absolute certainty of what appears "absurd and untrue."

In *Ghostly Matters*, a study that looks to the figure of the ghost to bring a notion of "complex personhood" to sociology, Avery Gordon posits that haunting is fundamentally about knowledge. Confronting the ghostly aspects of social life, Gordon writes, "requires (or produces) a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge, in our mode of production" (Gordon 7). Gordon's characterization of the ghost as a figure of affective knowledge is helpful in seeing the ghosts in transgender discourse specifically as figures of dysphoric knowledge:

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[32] A third book in what has become a series of memoirs, on transgender parenthood, was released in April 2013.

> The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition (Gordon 8).

We can trace haunting as a way of knowing affectively – and the particularities of transgender ghosts as figures of dysphoric knowledge – in the three appearances of ghosts in Boylan's second memoir. The subtitle *Growing Up Haunted* already suggests the centrality of hauntings and ghostly figures to the narrative trajectory. First, there is the ghost figure of pre-transition disembodiment:

> Back then I knew very little for certain about whatever it was that afflicted me, but I did know this much: that in order to survive, I'd have to become something like a ghost myself, and keep the nature of my true self hidden. And so I haunted that young body of mine just as the spirits haunted Coffin House,[33] as a hopeful, wraithlike presence otherwise invisible to the naked eye – like helium, or J.D. Salinger, or the G-spot (Boylan, *Looking* 25).

There is some tension in this passage between the notion of affliction, survival, and having to keep hidden on the one hand (all of which sound very similar to the way Ladin characterizes her experience a few years later), and the idea of a "hopeful, wraithlike presence" on the other. It will not help, I think, to try to unpack how helium, J.D. Salinger, or the G-spot are "hopeful" and/or "wraithlike." I think, in fact, that the way that this series of similes is both funny and failing is more instructive than to try to read it as if it worked. It introduces a kind of lightheartedness into the death-laden imagery of ghostliness, but because it is so preposterous, it very consciously draws attention to humor and hope as survival strategies of their own. Moreover, the wraithlike presence is hopeful by way of foreshadowing the two ghostly encounters that are to follow. In these narratives, what is a figure of present disembodiment is also frequently a promise – or a hope – of future embodiment.

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[33] The house is named after Samuel Coffin, who built it in 1890 (Boylan, *Looking* 30).

Secondly, there is the ghost that haunts Boylan's family home and makes appearances throughout the narrative of her growing up:

> The ghost first looked me in the eyes on a night in November. [...] I saw my own reflection as I drew near. Just as I reached out to touch the doorknob, I saw that there was someone behind me in the mirror, an older woman with long blond hair, wearing a white garment like a nightgown. Her eyes were a pair of small red stars. She seemed surprised to see me, and raised one hand to her mouth, as if I were a ghost, as if I were the one floating, translucently, in the mirror (Boylan, *Looking* 46f.).

This encounter, in which ghost and young Boylan meet in the mirror, and in which the question of which one is the ghost gets raised from the beginning, is the setup for the final scene that Boylan's narrative is working its way toward. At this point in the narrative, it is not yet clear who this ghost is, but it seems suggestive that she appears in the mirror, the other classic trope of transgender splitting.

Finally, the ghost of Boylan's encounter in the haunted childhood home appears again after her transition:

> I looked up, and *there she was*, just as in days long past. Floating in the mirror was the translucent old woman in the white clothes. I hadn't seen her reflected there for years and years, but here she was once more, looking at me with that surprised expression I remembered from my childhood. *Why, Jenny Boylan. What are you doing here?* Except that, as I stared at her, I realized that it was no ghost. After all this time, I was only looking at my own reflection [...]. Was it

> possible, I thought, as I looked at the woman in the mirror, that it was some future version of myself I'd seen here when I was a child? From the very beginning, had I only been haunting *myself*?
> [...] As for me, I have begun to suspect that far more hearts are haunted than houses. Maybe you don't really need an electromagnetic field recorder, or a thermal scanner, or a voice-activated tape recorder to investigate the paranormal. You only need a mirror.
> I looked at the reflection before me of the middle-aged woman with the long hair, the white nightgown. *What?* I asked her. *What do you want?* She smiled, and it occurred to me that at long last I understood what the woman in the mirror had been trying to tell me all along. *Don't be afraid, Jenny,* she said. *It's only me* (Boylan, *Looking* 249f.).

Unlike Ladin's moment that requires God to bring together the split figure of "boy" and "woman," Boylan only needs a mirror in which to encounter her post-transitional embodiment. She looks at her own reflection and recognizes it as the ghost that had been haunting her younger self. It is this sense of a ghost as a figure of, as Gordon suggests, transformative recognition (with an emphasis on transformative) that seems to inflect the earlier "hopeful, wraithlike presence." But just as in Ladin's narrative and despite the more humorous tone, Boylan's idea of a haunted heart and the "don't be afraid" suggest that even with this trajectory of a hopeful resolution, haunting and the figure of the ghost retain their negative affective charge. Boylan's three memoirs share an overall narrative voice that has very much left behind the ghosts and arrived in a present appreciating the humorous aspects of trans life. My reading of the dysphoric knowledge circulating in the ghost figure is not meant to dispute this other affective dimension of the larger narrative, which, in fact, is a story of overcoming and arrival characteristic of a number of trans autobiographies and, arguably, part of a long, Benjamin Franklinian tradition of autobiography as a story of a successful self. However, within that larger narrative and its tone, the figure of the ghost is a moment of negative affective charge and represents in many ways that which has been overcome to unify Boylan's confident, humorous voice telling this story.

Indeed, Boylan, like Ladin, draws attention to the problem of ghostly temporality and painful gendered histories. Boylan writes:

> I wiped my eyes. 'It's like, I went through this whole amazing change, and at last I feel content, at last I feel whole. But what about that kid I used to be? What about all those memories? That's the one thing they can't give you in surgery: a new history.' Shell rubbed my shoulder again. 'Maybe that's your superpower,' she said. 'What, super-self pity? Super-narcissism?' 'Super-gender,' she said. 'Super-memory.' I shook my head. Another big tear dripped down my face. 'Super-memory slows down your super-gender' (Boylan, *Looking* 256).

While there is no explicit ghost imagery here, it is quite clear (even without looking to Ladin's way of framing a similar problem) that the "kid I used to be" and "all those memories" appear to haunt the newly arrived at feeling of wholeness. On the one hand, there is a sense of mourning here – Boylan, in this passage, is crying. On the other, the idea of "super-gender" would suggest a somewhat privileged position of knowledge.

But before we get to epistemological concerns, let's tackle the issue of "super-memory" and its slowing down of "super-gender": A complete insertion into a coherent gender position that is not haunted by memories that require the telling of a different, or at the very least *lengthier* story is not possible. Lacking, as Hale notes above, a certain kind of stability necessary for "insertion into language" and "social ontology," or, as I would prefer to say, lacking unquestioned intelligibility as a gendered subject, lacking a taken-for-granted attribution of a comfortable gender (having, for instance, to insist on or introduce the change of one's gender pronoun), results in an incitement to speak, in a production of discourse, in flourishing rhetorics of ghosts, monsters, and such.

This having to produce gender slowly, rhetorically (and without recourse to sanctioned vocabulary) is often read, as Boylan somewhat jokingly acknowledges, as "super-self pity" or "super-narcissism."

Mourning and "super-gender," I want to suggest, are two (related) responses to the dysphoric knowledge figured in the ghost. Jacob Hale writes about transgender "flitting about the margins" of several gender categories as a ghostly position, and an epistemologically privileged one (having "already learned"):

> Flitting about the margins is not a refusal to own my location, nor is it valorization of gender play or gender fluidity. Flitting is a type of movement proper to ghosts: creatures abjected from full social existence who, instead, have only partial, limited social existence. [...] Having been thrown tumultuously out of the world of social existence already, ghosts never again expect a social world, structured by discourse, to provide homely comforts; we have already learned that home was an illusion, so we forego nostalgia for origins lost because never properly had (Hale, "Tracing a Ghostly Memory in My Throat: Reflections of Ftm Feminist Voice and Agency" 55).

While they do perhaps not resonate equally strongly with the experiences of all trans folks, the formulation of "thrown tumultuously" and the idea of "pretransition (dis-)embodiment" that I adopted from Prosser above (and am now pairing up with "post-transitional embodiment") have a particular experiential and rhetorical significance for women like Ladin and Boylan, who both at one point in their lives quite abruptly acquired a very different name, wardrobe, hairstyle, pronoun, and set of gender cues. While such terms might appear to reify a certain simplistic or even reactionary notion of transition, surgeries, and transsexuality, I am thus using them the way I encounter them, localized and descriptively, not prescriptively. Boylan's and Ladin's transitions, whether defined in terms of bodily modification or as social transitions, are starkly demarcated biographically (as the frequent references to death in Ladin remind us), and we might speculate that this is one reason why the figure of the ghost is so prevalent in their narratives.

The transgender "we" that Hale invokes points to this "limited social existence" as an important aspect of how the figure of the ghost functions in many more narratives not so easily demarcated by the specific cluster of social categorizations that Ladin and Boylan happen to share. However, I think Hale's next assertion does not automatically follow: This ghostly, "thrown" position does not necessarily mean a foregoing of nostalgia for origins – or, as we have seen in the two scenes of post-transitional reconciliation, of forgoing notions of resolution and arrival. Rather than a position of flitting, in which the transgender ghost already knows that home was an illusion, and forgoes expectations of homely comforts, some transgender narratives draw on ghosts to dwell on the affective dimensions of this knowledge – and, in doing so, precisely inhabit a kind of nostalgia. After all, insofar as nostalgia refers to an imaginary state of affairs, an idealized past, it is always for something never properly had. Therapist Griffin Hansbury, writing about the trans-trans analytic dyad, notes:

> Trans subjectivities and trans bodies remind us of what we've lost—both what we could have had and what we can never attain. No wonder they are difficult to describe (Hansbury 220).

Hansbury describes both the potential for nostalgic responses and the difficulty of finding a language for these experiences, one of those "difficult" descriptions that give rise to metaphors such as the ghost. Transgender ghosts can very well be figures of nostalgia, though one would have to more precisely say that it is a nostalgia for a past that is not idealized, but in fact a nostalgia for nostalgia, for a claim to a past to be idealized. Psychologist Christopher Shelley calls this a "historical loss" in his description of interviews with trans people:

> In MtFs there might be a melancholia for the historical loss of the gendered love that a daughter would have received rather than a 'son.' In FtMs there might be melancholia for loss of the mother who did not love him as she would have loved a son. There might be a melancholic loss of non-existent adolescent boyfriends or girlfriends, the missing and ghost-like figures of memory, of lost relations that could not develop, that might have otherwise been possible (C. A. Shelley 59).

I read the term "historical loss" not so much as a loss in the past, but a lack of a certain kind of gendered history. Shelley draws attention to the "ghost-like figures" of unlived parallel histories that might appear in transgender melancholia. Shelley does not explicate the use of melancholia here, but we can look to Judith Butler's attempt at situating what she calls "gendered pain," and what for our purposes here is perhaps better termed dysphoria, as part of Freud's "melancholia, a disavowed or unfinished mode of grieving." It is interesting to note here that Butler shares with De Lauretis the strategic approach to Freud of reading somewhat against-the-grain: Butler grants at the outset that "it is unclear" to her that a delineation of "gendered pain" in which "Freud's view is to be helpful" can happen (Butler, "Spirit of Revolt" 78). And so, while starting from Freud, her reading is a departure:

> Freud's description makes melancholia seem to be a relation between one person and another, but I want to suggest that what can be lost is precisely a sense of place or possibility as a person. If the work of the norm derealizes a life, then that life is in some sense lost, lost before being lost, and this sense of loss is precisely what cannot be recognized. Of course, the reason it cannot be recognized is that it is now defined as the unrecognizable, and so the life that has no place or standing as a life is precisely lost without any open mourning (Butler, "Spirit of Revolt" 80).

While this gives us a great handle on what Hansbury describes and what circulates through many trans narratives, the use of melancholia remains tricky even when expanded from Freud's relation between two people. The ghosts are often figures of describing a state of earlier melancholia, a state in which open mourning was impossible or loss unrecognized and unrecognizable, but at the moment at which these narratives emerge, what used to be unrecognizable and, thus, proper melancholy in a more traditional sense, is now open mourning. After all, Hansbury's clients and all the transgender memoirists are able to quite openly recognize this mourning. It is not an uncontested or uncontroversial recognition, as Benvenuto will assure you, but it is by no means rhetorically or psychically[34] impossible.

If, as Butler writes, "we are in the presence of an 'I' who is struggling to be heard, and who would triumph over what would silence that speaking, in order, simply, to live" (Butler, "Spirit of Revolt" 80), then this speaking, this rhetorical position from which to launch a narrative that contains ghosts, is also a moment of triumph. The transgender ghost, then, marks the emergence of something previously lost, disavowed, and impossible to mourn, something structurally melancholic, but now appearing as, on the one hand, a haunting, mournful presence, but also an implicit – and as Boylan's upbeat, success story tone shows, often explicit – triumph. Benvenuto, by contrast, whose investment in Ladin's silence was considerable and whose nostalgia is pretty straightforward, frames the emergence of this triumph as a personal loss.

Christopher Shelley's language in writing that "there might be melancholia" alerts us to the fact that the ghost as a figure of transgender mourning is merely one option – and Hale presents us with a different one, one that forgoes mourning of (the possibility of) nostalgia and instead embraces the privileged epistemological position of "having already learned." Both options, however, make the figure of the ghost one that carries the dysphoric knowledge that comes from being "thrown" into a "partial, limited social existence," into a position of pronominal and temporal narrative ghostliness, merely emphasizing and valuing affect and knowing in different ways.

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[34] Arguably, in taking melancholia and transposing it onto a larger terrain of the social, Butler has expanded the boundaries of the psychoanalytic in ways that make any reference or return to the psychic, as if that referred to an individual interiority, somewhat pointless.

Using "nostalgia" as one of the points of difference, Shelley writes about a "split" in the category of "'trans'" itself:

> In sum, transpeople challenge us inasmuch as they embody the postmodern condition – illustrating both nostalgia for a lost/desired *whole*/integrity, and the desire for indeterminacy, not to have to choose, to become something that either does not yet exist or is not recognized as legitimate in the broader culture. What emerges is a fundamental split or tension within the category of 'trans' itself, which is always present but not always acknowledged in the growing field of trans studies (C. A. Shelley 16).

On the one hand, it is important to recognize the heterogeneity of gendered narratives under the transgender umbrella that Shelley points to here. This heterogeneity is precisely why nostalgia is only one of the possible responses. Claims to indeterminacy, to not be bound by a binary gender system in which one must chose one or the other, certainly coexist – in the seeming (and sometimes contentious) tension that Shelley emphasizes – with transgender claims to somewhat traditional man- or womanhood. This "split" is, contrary to what Shelley suggests, very frequently recognized in debates about the usefulness of "transgender" as an umbrella term for phenomena ranging from 'traditional' transsexuals to genderqueer folks, cross-dressers, etc. However, Shelley misplaces the "fundamental split" onto a sphere of conflicting transgender rhetorical strategies. The split, it seems, is much more fundamentally between "what is recognized as legitimate in the broader culture" and both the "nostalgia for a lost/desired *whole*/integrity" and the desire for indeterminacy. As we have seen, "the lost/desired *whole*/integrity" is always one for something that does not quite exist, that is not available under the current regime of intelligibility – and this is why whatever seems in tension under the rubric 'trans' is in fact a heterogeneous grouping of all those whose experiences of and claims to gender are split from the available language of gendered truth claims.

Ghosts are also prominent in African-American discourse and we might look to Avery Gordon's insightful discussion of the importance of ghosts in her chapter on Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to help explicate some of the transgender usages as well. Gordon writes that ghosts are apparent in

> the capacity not only to live with specters, in order to determine what sort of people they were and could be, but also to engage the ghost, heterogenously but cooperatively, as metaphor, as weapon, as salve, as a fundamental epistemology for living in the vortex of North America (Gordon 151).

Gordon's language here – metaphor, weapon, epistemology – is useful for analyzing the ways in which the ghost appears in transgender moments of haunting. The ghosts in Boylan's, Ladin's, and Benvenuto's memoirs, however different they might be, all deal with the question of "what sort of people they were and could be" and all three engage the ghost as a metaphoric and epistemological figure (and, in the case of Ladin and Benvenuto, as a weapon in the struggle of marital dissolution).

As chapter II has argued, the monster appears in transgender rhetorics as a figure of gender dysphoric shame, of failed gendered sociality based on an experience of monsterized embodiment. Ghosts, as this chapter has been suggesting, appear as figures of (mourning or epistemologically privileging) disrupted temporal and pronominal narrative coherence, historical loss, and disembodiment, while mirrors stage scenes of experiences of gender that find no reflection in mirror models of knowledge. As figures that split/double the figure, ghosts and mirrors are about seeing and telling, but they also always point to epistemological concerns that are at the heart of metaphorization as a process of equation. Where mirror models of knowledge see reflection, transgender mirrors show the flawed equation of gender and sex, bodies and meaning. Barbara Johnson writes:

> [I]f meaningful metaphor requires that its equations be flawed, then the metaphorical act of understanding metaphor can never even truly be in possession of the meaningfulness of its own hyperbolic aberrations (Johnson 105).

If we think of metaphor as drawing flawed equations – and there is no "critical metalanguage that would not be enmeshed in the very metaphorical structures it attempts to comprehend" (Johnson 105) – then these transgender mirrors are perhaps particular kinds of *meta*-phors: The ghost and the reflection are figures of the un-reflected/ghosted transgender claims to gender as well as of the (flawed) equating of their metaphorical operation.

IV. Skin & Clothes

> For transsexuals a book may be read by its cover, and the bodily frame is thought of as another article of clothing, to be retouched at will (Millot 116).

Catherine Millot in her (anything but trans-friendly) investment in the "symbolic meanings of Oedipalized bodily materiality" (Davy 48) uses the book-is-to-cover-as-bodily-frame-is-to-clothes combination of tropes to dismiss such transgender reading practices as a fallacy of superficiality and misunderstanding. This suggestion happens in almost every word of Millot's sentence: There is the "cover," suggesting a more truthful book, there is "another article clothing," with dress generally "branded as marginal and inconsequential" (Cavallaro and Warwick 195) in comparison to what it clothes, and there is a retouching "at will," in concert with "another" suggesting a fickle, willfully superficial practice of retouching. Stella North suggests what is implicit in such a charge of surface reading:

> To 'take at face value' is implicitly to be short-changed of some truer value beneath; we are prone to take for granted the rightness of the opposition between surface and depth (North 70).

The truer value is beneath and surface and depth thus bear a different relationship to truth. While Millot's basic charge of superficiality and resulting judgment (of what it means to read gender by the cover and what kinds of readings can produce truth claims) are precisely what my take on transgender rhetorics and dysphoric knowledge sets out to argue against, Millot nevertheless points succinctly to the knot of skin/clothes/passing/reading that will be at the heart of this chapter.

Millot thus does not offer an original or insightful observation so much as she combines tropes that have long been pervasive in transgender discourse. Sandy Stone in her discussion of the ‘classic’ transsexual narrative writes: “[p]assing means to live successfully in the gender of choice, to be accepted as a ‘natural’ member of that gender” (Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto” 352) and notes that the opposite of passing is being “read” (Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto” 354). Of course, “reading” takes very different directions and meanings in these two versions (the transsexually endorsed reading of the book/cover bodily frame that Millot ridicules and the being “read” that happens when transsexuals are confronted with gender attributions based on the perceived cover of sex). In each case, however, there are an ‘outside,’ its perceptions and attributions, and their relationship to an ‘inside’ that is posited with it. In each case, what is at stake is the question of what kinds of reading can produce what kinds of knowledge claims about gender from/through skin or clothing.

This chapter will discuss the skin suits of violent transsexual movie tropes and the cloth skins of a transgender novel to think about skin and clothing as rhetorically gender-identity-laden surfaces and their place in the production of dysphoric knowledge. I will argue that the tropes of clothing and skin function according to metaphorical and metonymical logics that play out differently for transgender as opposed to cisgender knowledge claims.

Skin Suits, or *The* (Transgender) *Skin I Live In*

Pedro Almodóvar's 2011 film *The Skin I Live In* (La piel que habito) – much like Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs* 20 years earlier, which contained a disclaimer in the film's dialogue itself (Halberstam, "Skinflick" 577) – is not about transsexuality. In terms of plot, their characters are not claiming to be depictions of transgender individuals, but of a serial killer skinning his victims for a "woman suit" in the former and, in the latter, of a rapist turned into a physical copy of his victim's deceased mother as punishment. In fact, these brief character descriptions already suggest why these films are somewhat unlikely (or at the very least unfriendly) places to start an exploration of skin as a transgender trope. However, my project looks to these films not to chastise "negative" or "inaccurate" representations, nor to find "positive" images of transsexual characters or transgender narratives, but to highlight some central characteristics of transgender tropes that they bring to the fore. From the fantasy of a seamless skin suit, the "woman suit" as the FBI agent in *Silence* calls it (Halberstam, "Skinflick" 576), to the inverse transgender narrative with its multiple layers of imprisonment in *Skin*, these films demonstrate – perhaps in particularly hyperbolic terms because of their distance from the constraints of realistic representation of transgender identities or medical technology – ideas of skin as clothing and of gender as a body suit. In so doing, they lay bare some of the underlying cultural logics of how skin and gender are thought to relate, which are important for understanding the place and meanings of skin in transgender rhetorics.

Given that making a “woman suit” for himself is presented as the killer’s motivation, *Silence* has sparked debates over what kind of message *Silence* sends about the killer’s gender and sexuality despite the disclaimer about his psychiatric diagnosis.[35] Unsurprisingly, *Silence* has faced much criticism[36] that follows the, as Halberstam writes, “temptation to brand the film as homophobic” (Halberstam, “Skinflick” 577). Recognizing both the way in which the plot shores itself up against such criticism and the way it nevertheless deals in transgender and transphobic themes, Marjorie Garber writes (about the novel that the film is based on) that it

> declares its anxieties about transvestism and transsexualism in astonishingly overt ways. […] In one sense determinedly politically correct – Buffalo Bill is *not* a transsexual […] – *The Silence of the Lambs* is nonetheless a fable of gender dysphoria gone spectacularly awry (Garber 116)
> .

It is striking that Garber brings up the language of gender dysphoria here when it would seem that what goes awry in *Silence* is the metaphorical connection between skin and gender. Halberstam, too, describes the crucial role of “gender dysphoria” as the motive of the serial killer who “uses female skin to cover his pathological gender dysphoria” (Halberstam, “Skinflick” 577). It is particularly surprising to see “pathological gender dysphoria” appear in the writing of an important queer theorist and transgender scholar. Buffalo Bill is certainly presented as a “pathological” serial killer figure in the film – but it’s notable how quickly the pathology of killing and skinning women transforms into "pathological gender dysphoria" by way of motive and metaphor. Buffalo Bill speaks fairly little (and never about his motive, identity, or his feelings about gender), but one mirror scene and the plan to sew a skin suit are enough to suggest gender dysphoria to literary critic and queer theorist both. Making a "woman suit" out of skin is immediately legible as a metaphor of gender dysphoria even in a film that draws its horror from literalizing the skin metaphor and seemingly dislodging it from a transgender narrative.

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[35] Invoking the 1970s-style (see Meyerowitz (Meyerowitz) for a history of the decline of the centralized approach to transgender medical treatment at the end of the 1970s and the dispersion of medical authority to individual psych professionals) gate-keeping authority of “three major centers for transsexual surgery - Johns Hopkins, University of Minnesota, and Columbus Medical Center” (Hannibal Lecter in *Silence*) to decide who is and is not a “transsexual” as proof that Buffalo Bill is not means remaining in a thoroughly psychiatrized and pathologized framework.

[36] For a rhetorical analysis of the “clash over interpretation” regarding homophobia (and transphobia) in *Silence*, see Kendall Phillips’ article in the Rhetorical Review (K. R. Phillips).

The murderer who wants a "woman suit" treats the skin as gender: "Buffalo Bill's sewing machine treats gender as an outfit made of natural fibers. Skin becomes the material which can be transformed by the right pattern into a seamless suit" (Halberstam, "Skinflick" 578). The adjective "seamless" appears to formulate the serial killer's fantasy rather than the anything but seamless results in the film, where the skin being sewn on that sewing machine, Buffalo Bill wearing a ragged-edged scalp piece, and the incomplete skin suit on a dress form belie any seamlessness. Of course, seamlessness is not just the fantasy of one singular serial killer character, it is an integral part of how gender is mapped onto the body in a much larger cultural fantasy[37] – *Skin* consequently presents us with Vera's seamless (suit of) replacement skin, as we will see below.

Seamlessness means not showing marks of construction, means a skin that bears no marks of surgery (or violence). Seamlessness naturalizes the identity that skin is supposed to mark as coherent, closed, and timeless. Transgender theorist Bobby Noble, writing about his post-transitional chest, reminds us that neither seamlessness, nor new skin à la *Silence* and *Skin* are actually part of surgical/medical transitioning, in fact, there is no new body as foundation to be had: “this is the body not as foundation but as archive; this is the same chest, the same body, the same flesh I have always known, only now its text is totally different” (Noble, *Sons* 84). But the cultural fantasy of opposite sexes in thoroughly different bodies (inside and out, skin and bone) wants to imagine transitioning as a new body, a new skin, whose text is “totally different” only if appearing seamless. Seamlessness is precisely a way of conflating skin and body, of naturalizing the skin’s text. This fantasy of seamlessness is culturally prevalent; it is not just the fantasy of a fictional serial killer who “thinks he is not in the wrong body, but the wrong skin, an incorrect casing” (Halberstam, “Skinflick” 577). Since it is unclear what exactly Buffalo Bill thinks, perhaps we should not be so quick to oppose “wrong body” and “wrong skin” here. Buffalo Bill’s “woman suit” illustrates the way in which, when it comes to gender, skin is only ever the “incorrect casing” – as soon as it appears seamless, as soon as it manages to produce seamlessness as an effect, it is read as the body.

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[37] Like so many fantasies, this one has become a silicone product, see FemSkin.com's offer: "The Seamless FemSkin III just $850 for a limited time only!"

If *Silence of the Lambs*, as J. Halberstam writes, “cannibalized its genre” (Halberstam, “Skinflick” 575), then *The Skin I Live In* cannibalizes more than one set of generic and other influences, mashing up elements from Hitchcock to Bluebeard, rape-revenge movies to Frankensteinian doctor/scientist imagery,[38] Pygmalion to Louise Bourgeois. A brief summary of *Skin*’s relevant plot elements can thus be a little overwhelming: Surgeon Robert Ledgard takes revenge on Vicente (played by Jan Cornet) for sexually assaulting his daughter. He kidnaps Vicente and turns him into a look-alike of his (Ledgard's) deceased wife: After a vaginoplasty, all of Vicente's skin is replaced by genetically-engineered (the film appears to delight in the pun of the adjective "transgenic") skin that Ledgard is experimenting with. The surgically-modified hostage then also receives a new name, Vera (and is played by Elena Anaya), wears a full-body compression garment for long periods of time, writes on the wall of her cell and makes stitched-up doll figurines, cuts up the dresses and items of feminine clothing she is given, is raped by the housekeeper's son who is subsequently killed by Ledgard, and – after feigning cooperation and love – sleeps with and kills her captor to escape.

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[38] Andrew O’Hehir’s interview with the filmmaker for Salon.com is titled “Almodóvar builds a new Frankenstein” (O’Hehir).

Almodóvar himself has commented in an interview on how he sees "transsexuality" function as an element in this film:

> The doctor in the film operates the most atrocious changes on someone's body, but in doing so he never touches what you might call the inner soul, the inner spirit, what makes us truly human. In this film I treat transsexuality in a completely different way from in my earlier films. In this film it's the most atrocious punishment, whereas in my previous films it's a way of reaffirming your true identity (O'Hehir).

He is not alone in noting the difference between Vicente/Vera and the transgender characters of his other movies – and not alone in using the term "transsexuality" or "transsexualism" to describe the surgical procedures that Vicente/Vera is subjected to, either. Rob White parenthesizes in his summary of the film for a *Film Review* web debate: "(For what must be the first time in an Almodóvar film, transsexualism has no positive valence: here it is sheer violent mutilation and the cause of torment)" (Smith and White). While "sheer mutilation" is indeed a characterization of vaginoplasty that makes the film problematic for anyone who might be interested in thinking vaginoplasties as something other than a (boring) symbol of castration, it is unclear that the film's story about gender and about the valence of transgender can be so easily boiled down.

Paul Julian Smith very much reads the transgender tropes in *Skin* as leading to a moral about gender identity:

> One image I love in this highly aestheticized film is of hundreds of shreds of floral flocks scattered on a floor. The very picture of Vicente–Vera's gender trouble, these torn dresses point to an unlikely final moral: the vindication of an essential sexual identity (being 'true' to one's birth sex) that trumps the playfully postmodern gender roles with which Almodóvar is conventionally credited (Smith and White).

Instead of "transsexuality" being used as a narrative of identity to explain medical transition, Almodóvar and Smith both appear to uncritically use the term to refer to medical transition itself. From that perspective, within that definition, the film indeed appears to make an anti-transgender case for "birth sex" (though for that to be the final moral, one would have to view the film as making a case about transsexuality in general, for which the particularities make Vicente/Vera an extremely poor candidate). But if we look not at a set of medical procedures as "transsexuality," but at Vera/Vicente in terms of transgender identity categories, then the elements of Vera-Vicente's story – forced to "live" in the skin of an extended transgender metaphor, encased in new (pain-insensitive) skin, a new face, and a neo-vagina – arguably suggest that the character occupies a transgender narrative position at the end of this violent transition. Vera-Vicente ends up in the "wrong body," as problematic and narratively overdetermined as the story might be – including the backstory of sexually assaulting Ledgard's daughter, the identity-troubling fact that there is a new face and skin, so much so that the viewer is confronted with a whole new actress, and the taking over of the face of the surgeon's dead wife. "Torn dresses," violence against clothes as stand-ins for a gender expression that feels like a violent imposition,[39] are then just another transgender trope around skin/clothing/gender that *Skins* uses to situate Vicente-Vera psychologically in this extreme materialization of the trope of the "wrong body" as the character's filmic reality. In other words, in following Vicente/Vera's narrative and giving importance to its tropes, the film spreads out the elements of a transgender narrative. It is questionable, then, that if we find a moral of an "essential identity" in the film, it is one of "(being 'true' to one's birth sex)." On the contrary, because it plays through so many transgender tropes (and does so through two different people playing the same role), this supposed story of "essential identity" has little recourse to something like "birth sex." Vicente is not a transsexual; Vera might be read as FTM – and this cannot be unified to a moral about either transgender identity or birth sex. Moreover, because Vicente/Vera's identity and future remain largely open at the end of the film, Smith is altogether too quick in finding a "final moral" at all.

Skin, this highly-stylized collage of filmic genre elements that spends little time on realist impressions or the suspension of disbelief, is perhaps better understood when we read its use of tropes as more about the tropes themselves than the character tangled up in them. Smith himself goes on to muse whether this "moral" is merely one of the film's stylistic devices: "Old-style essential identities may be a ‘trope’ (like old-style video) but they’re a trope the character is forced to stake her life on” (Smith and White). While this appears to be a point of criticism for Smith, for whom staking one’s life on a trope is a rejection of more complex ideas about identity (“playfully postmodern” – see quote above), I think he has somewhat accidentally formulated a much more interesting conclusion of the Vera-Vicente gender narrative (and I would strongly resist the urge to find one moral in a film that has so many different convoluted storylines): Rather than restaging, in the most unlikely of scenarios, a sexual binary commonplace of birth sex = gender in the language of “old-style essential identities,” *Skin* presents a tour-de-force through the tropes of gender that people are forced to stake their lives on.

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[39] The "torn dresses" are reminiscent of the "suicided skirts" that the FTM main character throws out the window in Rose Tremain's novel *Sacred Country* (Tremain 156).

While I think *Skin* offers an inroad to thinking about skin as a transgender trope in particular, it seems uncontroversial to claim that the film in general uses tropes in an obvious, ostentatious, hyperbolic manner in its exploration of questions of identity. Rob White calls the film “cold, cruel, detached,” but the detachment is arguably just an effect of the way this tropical overload turns the characters into ciphers and avoids the usual psychologizing, identificatory gestures of mainstream narrative film. White also notes the film’s “disaffection, discomfort, suffering” and that “the *enjoyable* Almodóvar trademarks have gone missing” (Smith and White), which indicates that perhaps the detachment is more meant to indicate an absence of positive affect than of all affect. Perhaps White should have called its style cold, cruel, and camp for its theatrical use of metaphor and flamboyant mixing of genre elements.

Beginning with its very title, *The Skin I Live In* highlights central notions surrounding tropes of skin: Skin as house, as space one lives in, the self as "in" the skin. The film repeats, repeats, and repeats images of being trapped inside outer layers. For most of the film, Vera is *in*, is confined to Ledgard's house, the locked room that serves as a cell, the artificial/new skin, the compression suit, and the dresses. German studies scholar Claudia Benthien in her "close reading of central metaphors, topoi, and mental images that have shaped the Western relationship to one's own skin and the skin of others" (Benthien ix) argues that one of the ways skin is conceptualized is through the "analogy between the house and the human body" (Benthien 25), which constructs "the body (i.e., the skin) as hollow, inhabitable space" (Benthien 27). One of the lessons Benthien's tracing of these notions and her often interchangeable use of the terms skin and body have for thinking about transgender skin tropes is that in this particular account of the history of ideas, being in the wrong skin and being in the wrong body are part of the same discursive constellation.

In fact, if we follow Benthien, the very idea of "in" might give rise to feelings and rhetorics of wrongness. She argues that her study shows two different ways of conceptualizing the relation between self and skin:

> At the outset, I formulated the guiding thesis that figurative speech about skin reveals a duality between thinking about the self as in the skin and the self as the skin. I further noted that the notion of the self as in the skin has undergone a highly problematic development right up to the present day: human beings feel increasingly less sheltered in the skin and more concealed and hidden – less protected and more imprisoned (Benthien 237).

Benthien is suggesting that feelings of imprisonment and hiddenness are a result of this shift in the notion of skin – and this is an interesting way of aligning affect and discursive shifts. While Benthien may be overly universalizing in her claim (surely not all human beings are subject to the same discursive shifts at the same time), she points to the larger (historical) context of concepts of selves "in" bodies/skins that is highly suggestive specifically for thinking about how such a notion facilitates a trope such as the "wrong body." Bethien's broad stroke is helpful as a backdrop for arguing that, in light of how skin tropes appear in transgender rhetorics, a different understanding of the relationship between the notion of "in" the skin and feelings of imprisonment is possible.

Before turning to two examples from transgender writing to make this case, let us counter Benthien's skepticism – that appears to suggest that doing away with the notion of "in" the skin might cure implied feelings of imprisonment – with a reminder from Denise Riley, who argues that the language of skin and body as envelopes of the self is deeply rooted:

> Naturally undeterred by such speculative misgivings, our selves will continue to nurse their secret envelopes [...]. This seemingly universal spatial and temporal metaphoricity means that one wants at least to track its obstinate ubiquity, to incorporate these metaphors as natural features, and to not consider them as misleading defects, distortions, or seductions. [...] Undecidable for thought, in practice figurative speech of interior depth remains solidly as it is. It is – to stage another of those captivating vanishing points between metaphorical and nonfigurative speech – profoundly embedded in language (Riley, *Selves* 48f.).

Skin as a discursive envelope persists in spite of fruitless attempts to think our way out of such notions (and so the spatial metaphorizing persists even in this very sentence). And their ubiquity way beyond transgender discourse makes clear that criticizing trans rhetorics for reiterating essentialist notions through such "distortions" overlooks the larger rhetorical conditions and the ways in which these figures are embedded in language rather than individual speakers – as well as the undecidability of what distinguishes a "distortion" from whatever the opposite is posed to be (a more appropriate trope, a more referential language?).

Following Lynda Hart, we may want to re-frame rather than dismiss as essentialist appeals to an interior, something under the skin that would hold meaning more securely and directly. Hart uses the terms ‘body’ and ‘flesh’ in ways that are useful for rethinking the often rigid distintion between exteriority and interiority that the skin is supposed to uphold or demarcate: “The dialectic is between the body – the home of the culturally constructed ‘self’ – and the ‘flesh’ – the abstracted desire for something that is not performance, is prior to performance, is beyond performance” (Hart 149). The flesh here is not the ground – not, to use the central terms of this chapter, the skin beyond the performance of clothes – but is the “abstracted desire” for such flesh. The ‘self’ does not live in the flesh, its home is the culturally located body. Hart is very clear about the equidistant relationship of both to any “beyond” of performance or to any inside of envelopes: “Both the ‘body’ and the ‘flesh’ are illusions. Both are phantasmic constructs. But they serve different ends, purposes, and desires” (Hart 10). Similarly, the envelopes nursed by Riley’s metaphorizers and the language of interiority and exteriority surrounding the skin are then not evidence of a stable distinction, but of different ends, purposes, and desires.

Like many others, the transgender memoirist discussed in the last chapter, Joyce Ladin, uses tropes of skin such as “estrangement from my skin” (Ladin, *Door* 39) somewhat interchangeably with references to the body such as “feeling like a stranger in one’s own body” (Ladin, *Door* 67). The emphasis seems to be on the feeling of distortion and estrangement, on dysphoria that is not easily reduced to any discrete bodily or skin characteristic. While the underlying notion is very much the spatialized one Benthien writes about, Ladin appears more concerned with the strangeness than the being enveloped "in" per se. Ladin's use of "the skins of masculinity" to refer to "the pants and shirts I hated, the roles and games I forced myself to play" (Ladin, *Door* 116) supports a reading that foregrounds skin as a trope of gender dysphoria, of an imprisonment that becomes housed in the language of skin because of how skin itself has been (as Benthien shows) rhetorically constructed, but that is more about gender than it is about historical shifts in that rhetorical construction.

From Ladin's example of the gender dysphoric dimension, we can look to Aaron Raz Link for how the transgender trope of skin is linked to knowledge:

> Everything lied to the world about who I was, when worn on my skin. In ways more subtle and corrosive, my own knowledge of myself was a lie, proved false by the failure of that self to reach anyone though [sic] the impenetrable barrier of my own skin (Link and Raz 194f.).

This passage prominently features a self "in" the skin, but what's at issue is the lie as an effect of the skin. What role does skin play for questions of knowledge and truth claims? Literary theorist Steven Connor, whose book is dedicated to the "contemporary fascination with the powers of the skin, as substance, vehicle and metaphor" (Connor 9), writes that

> [t]he skin figures. […] More than the means of what we happen voluntarily or involuntarily to disclose to sight, it has become the proof of our exposure to visibility itself (Connor 50f.).

If the skin is about "exposure to visibility" then the "impenetrable barrier" for transgender writers such as Link is one of the 'wrong' kind of visibility: While skin is expected to be the site of exposing sex as visible gender, Link's "own knowledge of [himself]" as gendered has no such proof. The language of being "in" the skin offers a rhetorical grasp on the dysphoric knowledge of being exposed to visibility to the point of dispossession. Judith Butler writes that "the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others" – because of this exposure, "[t]he body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 21). In a world in which gender as a social phenomenon is treated as if it were grounded in the body, Link's body made the public dimension acutely felt as one in which his body was *not* his – and it "lied" insofar as it failed to sustain with proof of visibility (and resultant recognition in the public dimension) any knowledge of his body as his. Using Nietzsche's language that "to be truthful means using the customary metaphors," I am arguing that the inability to use the customary metaphor of skin as gender in a customary way produces knowledge without the "mobile army" that makes "truth" (Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke Bd. 1* 880; Nietzsche, *Portable* 46f.). Link's language is without this mobile army. His "impenetrable barrier" of skin that lies to the world is the trope that crystallizes the dysphoric knowledge of his gender as one that cannot be put seamlessly into the customary metaphorical relationships of being and having.

Clothing theorists Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick suggest that it is difficult, in general, for the clothed, embodied subject to "decide" or "establish" its relationship to these layers of embodiment as one of being or having:

> If it is difficult for the subject to decide whether the body is something it is or has, it is even trickier for it to establish whether the clothes with which it is intimately connected are part of its being or rather an item in the parcel of its having. The subject is a body and has a body; but it also is and has, at one and the same time, the clothes that it wears (Cavallaro and Warwick 4).

The deciding and establishing that happens in this passage is an interesting choice of words (in addition to perhaps unwillingly, but certainly implicitly presupposing a relationship of 'having' in setting up a situation of a pronouncement over objects at the subject's disposal). These verbs suggest a process of recognition and insight, a coming to a philosophical conclusion – though the final sentence reveals that the question suggests the conclusion is not a decision between alternatives, but a double 'both:' Both clothing and the body are similar in that the subject both has and is them. I think we might want to understand the difficulty of deciding between being and having of clothing and the body as a rhetorical difficulty. Cavallaro and Warwick's double both is then just an affirmation of competing, possible, sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent discursive constructions. – Albeit one that is slightly skewed toward giving clothing weight through insisting that it, "also," shares the same status as the body. As their own passage demonstrates in using skin to establish their argument about the importance of clothing, what rhetorics of "being" and "having" are about are not the body or clothing, but what the subject establishes about itself through claims about clothing and the body (or the skin). And so the circulation of tropes of skin and clothing in transgender rhetorics is about establishing, in different ways, claims to the "being" and "having" of gender.

Masen Davis, the FTM director of the Transgender Law Center, was called a "lady" by his debate opponent in a CNN news segment after California's Assembly Bill 1266 for Transgender student rights had been signed by the Governor in August 2013. The Transgender Law Center responded to the incident with a press release (also included in a facebook and website image), featuring a screenshot from the CNN interview and a statement about the incident by Davis (Dolan).

The message by Davis opens with: "I am comfortable in my own skin, and proud of my journey as a transgender man." The appearance of skin in this answer to his opponent's "attempt to mis-gender" Davis highlights the crucial role of skin as a trope through which the question of how to know and read someone's gender is negotiated. Against the gender dysphoria of the "mis-gendering," Davis sets feeling "comfortable in his skin" as a transgender man. He affirms "being" a man through "having" his skin – but the fact that he has to claim his skin in such a way means that he has not always had it. His transgender body, not seamless, must show rhetorical skin.

Cloth Skins: The Fabrics of Gender in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*

Henry Rubin opens the introduction to his book *Self-Made Men* with a reference to *Boys Don't Cry*, explaining the person whose life and murder the film is based on in the following words: "Brandon Teena was a female-to-male transsexual (FTM), who longed to live life as a man, despite the female body he wore like a costume" (Rubin, *Self-Made Men* 2). Rather than restoring a notion of unknowability to the names and identity markers attributed to this murder victim here,[40] I want to focus on the definitional work Rubin performs not on "Brandon Teena," but on what it means to be a female-to-male transsexual, to long to "live life as a man, despite the female body" worn "like a costume." Rubin makes every word count here, it seems: Living life as a man is a *longing* (rather than a straightforward action), precisely because of the *costume* of the female body. This body is not a costume, but is *worn like* one. The divesting of gender-determinative significance from this "female body" then is not something that happens solely through Rubin's calling it a costume. Instead Rubin suggests that Brandon Teena's longing, living, and wearing itself was a practice of meaning-making that turned the 'female' of the body into something as insubstantial as a costume and that longed/lived to spite the costume's attributed meaning.

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[40] For an overview of the naming and labeling issues surrounding the responses to this murder, see C. Jacob Hale's 1998 article in GLQ (Hale, "Consuming the Living").

While Rubin writes – at least nominally (regardless of how much this passage might speak to his own feelings as an FTM scholar regarding emdodiment and costume) – about "Brandon Teena," Beth Elliot writes about her own experience wearing "a man's" body in strikingly similar terms: "I've had some familiarity with that kind of body, but it always seemed like a garment that didn't fit right – strange, awkward, and uncomfortable" (Nettick 77). Writing about "the female body" or "a man's body" in terms of clothing for these transgender writers, from theorist to autobiographer, is a way to cast the sexed body as an ill-fitting, uncomfortable, and an external layer. In fact, the sexing – "female" and "man's" – often get located on the level of skin, as an outer layer covering over a gendered core, a true, more fitting gender identity, that is located spatially as "internal."

In Henry Rubin's use of the language of interior- and exteriority, there is an immediate conceptual slip from "internal identity" to the body's actual "interior" – internal identity/interior are what's underneath the skin, not merely like organs, but alongside organs: "Everyone has an internal identity. This interior is not just filled with organs and bones, but is also filled by something we might call a soul or self" (Rubin, *Self-Made Men* 13). Rubin literalizes the idea of an internal identity, which we might rather want to think of as a metaphorical way of speaking, and makes it reside inside the body alongside organs and bones.

Jason Cromwell argues a similar point, but casts the relationship between gender and clothing somewhat differently. Where Rubin insists that the sexed body can be like an ill-fitting garment, Cromwell insists that gender identity is "basic," is unlike clothing:

> transpeople do not take off gender as though it were clothing. Contrary to Butler's statement about there being 'no gender identity behind the expressions of gender', gender and gendered identity are, and feel, basic to beingness (Cromwell 42).

Of course, this is, as Donald Hall would remind us, the "bad" reading of Butler. When Judith Butler argued in *Gender Trouble* that

> gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. [...] If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no pre-existing identity by which an act or attribute might be measured (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 179f.)

some critics, fearing for the integrity of feminism's subject, (mis)read Butler's argument about performativity as one about performance, as saying people take a willfully arbitrary gender out of their closet to put on for the day:

> The bad reading goes something like this: I can get up in the morning, look in my closet, and decide which gender I want to be today. I can take out a piece of clothing and change my gender, stylize it, and then that evening I can change it again and be something radically other (D. E. Hall 74).

These feminist critics used the seeming meaninglessness or inconsequentiality of clothes to attack Butler's deconstructive, anti-essentialist argument much the same way Millot responds to transsexual insistence on taking the book by its surgically modified cover. Unlike such feminist critics, transgender critics cast off the clothing-like layer of reading bodies through sexual characteristics, but often take issue with (the bad reading of) Butler for suggesting gender identity is not internal – for making it too clothing-like.

Cromwell's (mis-)reading of performativity becomes explicit when he later calls his straw-theorist opponents 'performance-based':

> Performance-based theories of gender cannot account for people 'doing gender' outside social interactions. Contrary to some theorists' claims, transpeople do not don and then cast off gender identities. They wear them all the time (Cromwell 43).

Unlike 'performance,' performativity does not actually suggest that gender is not "worn all the time" – nor does it understand "doing gender" as limited to a narrow notion of "social interactions" (as something that happens solely in encounters between people), as if the socio-cultural meanings of gender fell away the minute one went out of sight of others. As the discussion of mirror scenes has shown, one can confront the gaze of others even in one's own, and people are never completely outside of social interactions, not even in moments of the most failed sociality.

In other words, what Cromwell claims is "contrary" is, in fact, not necessarily contrary to what Butler and others have claimed. It is possible to defend at length a more nuanced reading of performativity. Moreover, Gayle Salamon lays out some of the problems of using 'the transsexual' as evidence against a certain reading of queer theory (shared by Cromwell and Prosser), which posits a (gender identity) core with a surface cast as "nonessential" and "unimportant":

> [For Prosser,] The transsexual reveals queer theory's own limits: what lies beyond or beneath its favored terrain of gender performativity. The model of surface, of covering, is seen as an occasion for an inquiry after what is behind or beneath that surface. Prosser wants to reveal the hidden and, presumably, disavowed materiality that lies beneath performativity, a materiality

> performativity (understood as synonymous with queer theory understood, ultimately, as synonymous with Judith Butler) is trying to hide (Salamon, *Assuming* 28).

Salamon's explanation of what motivates Prosser's insistence on materiality speaks equally well to Cromwell's notion of having to defend gender as something that feels "basic to beingness" against ideas of it as something to "don and then cast off" *like clothing*. Gender, such positions want to insist, is not as easy as putting on a dress. They argue that there is obviously more materiality to gender – covers and clothing are frilly ornaments of books and bodies.

Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* turns the argument that gender is not as easy as putting on a dress on its head by making a transgender case for the symbolic materiality of clothes. The novel is a good reminder that there have long been transgender voices arguing that putting on a dress is everything BUT easy. It is not that gender, being questioned as to its construction by Butler's interrogation of identities or by transgender claims to disarticulate it from sex, has become as inconsequential as clothes, but rather that clothes as part of numerous symbolic and discursive ("stylized") socially scripted acts of gender can be as consequential as gender, are integral parts of what becomes gender.

Much in the way *The Well* concentrates salient features of the mirror trope in chapter III, *Stone Butch Blues* and the debates around it bring into view the affective and identificatory investment in transgender references to clothes. In what is to follow, I will – in contrast to Kathryn Bond Stockton's focus on the role of shame as the central factor in the novel's circulation of desire – argue that *SBB* is more concerned with gender and the importance of clothing for (trans)gender identities (i.e. in the context of what is sometimes called ‘cross dressing’) in conflict with what is perceived as the ‘naked truth’ of the sexed body.

Clothes are at the center of *Stone Butch Blues* from the very start. In the letter that opens the novel, the erotic dynamics, the relationship and geography of touch, between butch Jess and femme Theresa are described largely in terms of Theresa’s loving attention to Jess clothes: She “smoothed my collar,” “adjusted my tie,” and put her “hand on my belt, up under my suit” (L. Feinberg 6–8). Loving Jess involves touching clothes and embracing a clothed other. Conversely, violence in the novel is frequently presented through descriptions of clothing: “One of the cops loosened my tie. As he ripped open my new dress shirt, the sky blue buttons bounced and rolled across the floor” (L. Feinberg 62). In the opening letter, Jess recalls Theresa’s attention to the impact of encounters with violence, again through clothes, which are carriers of scars even after having been removed from the body: “You gently rubbed the bloody places on my shirt and said, ‘I’ll never get these stains out’” (L. Feinberg 10). The strong link between clothes and physical violations also appears when Jess vows: “I promised myself I would never wear a dress again, and I’d never let anyone rape me ever again, no matter what. As it turned out, I could only keep one of those promises” (L. Feinberg 50).

This link between rape and dress-wearing is one that appears to be made by the perpetrators of violence as well. Their violence is frequently directed at the masculinity the butches wear on their sleeve. The butches’ gender (in)vestment in clothes is clearly understood by the boys who assault Jess and pull hir[41] pants down in high school (L. Feinberg 18). Like those bullies, the police try to violently reduce the butches' gender identities to the allegedly female meaning of their naked bodies:

> The cops picked out the most stone butch of them all to destroy with humiliation, a woman everyone said 'wore a raincoat in the shower.' We heard they stripped her, slow, in front of everyone in the bar, and laughed at her trying to cover up her nakedness. Later she went mad, they said. Later she hung herself (L. Feinberg 8).

In (rein)forcing the dominant cultural meanings and conceptualizations of this stone butch's female body, the cops strip her not just of her clothes, but of the gender identity vested in her clothes. They try to police the coherence of what Butler has called the dimensions of "significant corporeality":

> The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender – indeed, where none of these dimensions of significant corporeality express or reflect one another (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 185).

The brief but dramatic anecdote of police violence leading to suicide in the opening pages of *Stone Butch Blues* suggests that the raincoat-in-the-shower butch's transgender clothing cannot be stripped down to sex and its corresponding gender attribution. Stripping does not expose the "naked truth" – it just exposes itself as a gesture of dominance. Like peeling the layers of an onion, the result is annihilation; the end of this stripping is death. Killing deviance means killing deviants.

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[41] The first-person point of view in *Stone Butch Blues* leaves the question of the protagonist's third-person pronoun open. The other butches like the one in this passage, the "he-shes" around Jess (even characters who have medically transitioned) (L. Feinberg 95), are addressed with feminine pronouns in the text – but this is perhaps more a function of the historical setting and transgender Bildungsroman-type education and coming into consciousness of Jess than a good indicator of what pronoun to use for the protagonist. Most secondary sources use feminine pronouns following this evidence, some use "s/he" and "hir," frequently inspired as much by an autobiographical reading and assumptions/conflicting information about Leslie Feinberg's pronoun as by the desire to reflect the evolving transgender identity of the novel's protagonist. Since the text is to a certain degree didactic (full of teaching moments and book recommendations), I will – with perhaps a few exceptions when immediately engaging sources that use she/her – join those using the non-binary set of pronouns as they are narratively implied. It should be noted that pronoun choice in the secondary literature does not necessarily reflect a certain kind (lesbian, FTM, non-binary, …) reading of the novel or the figure of the transgender butch.

Philosopher Hans Blumenberg's tracing of ideas of the "naked truth" is suggestive for reading this moment of police violence, which acts out a metaphor of nakedness and thinks itself in pursuit of a kind of truth that is metaphorically on/of the skin. As part of his larger concern with the relationship between metaphors and concepts (*Begriffe*) in philosophical thought, Blumenberg situates the metaphor of the truth as "naked" historically:

> Die Rede von der ‚nackten Wahrheit' war in der Neuzeit primär eine bürgerliche Rede gegen die Kleiderwelt des Adels und des Klerus, aber sie wurde wiederholbar für jeden kommenden Stand, der sich selbst nackt glaubte und die Kleider der anderen nun als Verkleidungen herunterreißen wollte (Blumenberg, *Paradigmen* 64).[42]

The naked truth thus originated in a bourgeois gesture of positing oneself as naked and from that position disrobing, or, rather, exposing, the opposing party. The historical emergence and deployment of this metaphor leads Blumenberg to argue: "Die Metapher der ‚nackten Wahrheit' gehört zum Selbstbewusstsein der aufklärerischen Vernunft und ihrem Herrschaftsanspruch" (Blumenberg, *Paradigmen* 71).[43] As part of Enlightement reason, this metaphor positions truth as an object of voyeurism: "Die Metapher der Nacktheit setzt ein Verhältnis des Außer-einander-seins voraus, ein Voyeur-Verhältnis" (Blumenberg, *Paradigmen*

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[42] "In the modern age, talk of the 'naked truth' has mainly figured in bourgeois diatribes against the sartorial world of the First and Second Estates, but it could equally be adopted by every up-and-coming class that thought itself naked and wanted to strip others of their vestments as so many disguises" (Blumenberg, *Paradigms* 43).

[43] "The metaphor of the 'naked truth' pertains to the self-awareness of enlightened reason and its claim to mastery" (Blumenberg, *Paradigms* 47).

76).[44] In drawing attention to this close, long-standing metaphorical relationship between truth and the 'naked' body, Blumenberg offers a way of understanding and attacking essentialisms that make the body the bearer of the 'naked truth' of gender attribution a) in their suggestive appeal and b) as closely related with Enlightenment reason, its claim to power (*Herrschaftsanspruch*), and its voyeuristic, ocular-centric, and objectifying relation to bodiliness. This scene in *SBB* suggests that the idea of "naked truth" has particular consequences for those for whom clothing is charged with gendered truth claims that nakedness could only undermine and never (not even in the reductive essentialism forced upon the coherently gendered) 'verify'.

From the specter of this nameless queer corpse and against the dominant claims to police gender through "naked truths," the novel sets out to affirm the life and the (in-)vestments of transgender butch identity. Jess's coming-of-age story begins in a history of childhood unbelonging, dysphoria, and violence. From school to home life, Jess is confronted with the negotiation of questions – "Is that a boy or a girl?" (L. Feinberg 13) – and prescriptions around gender, including prescriptions of dress:

> "I want a Davy Crockett hat." My father tightened his grip. "I said no." "But why?" I cried. "Everybody has one except me. Why not?" His answer was inexplicable. "Because you're a girl" (L. Feinberg 19).

True to the continuous thread of significant fabrics in the novel, Jess's own idea of gender is related to the clothes found in her father's closet, which s/he puts on in the face of certain punishment: "I put on the suit coat and looked in the mirror. A sound came from my throat, sort of a gasp" (L. Feinberg 20). This mirror scene is framed as a moment of masculine identification, of recognizing a future self, a gender presentation that is grounded in wearing certain clothes. Jess is not alone in seeing these clothes as of great gendered significance: Like the police in the opening anecdote, Jess's parents find clothes alarming enough to send their child to a mental ward (L. Feinberg 21ff.). Their subsequent attempt to force her into feminine dress and comportment only highlights for Jess hir "shameful differences." Charm school intensifies and genders feelings of disjuncture and unbelonging: "My face burnt with humiliation […]. Charm school finally taught me once and for all that I wasn't pretty, wasn't feminine, and would never be graceful" (L. Feinberg 23). How we read what makes Jess's face "burn with humiliation" here is important for how we read the role of gendered clothing in the novel. Is Jess's face burning with what with J. Halberstam we might call the "shame of inappropriate gendering" (Halberstam, "Between" 64), a gender dysphoric shame? Or is the shame in *Stone Butch Blues* one of the "beautiful, generative, sorrowful debasements that make bottom pleasures so dark and so strange" (Stockton, *Beautiful* 8)?

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[44] "The metaphor of nakedness presupposes a voyeuristic relationship of exteriority" (Blumenberg, *Paradigms* 51).

Kathryn Bond Stockton situates her discussion of *Stone Butch Blues* in her book *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame* with an apt formulation of what is at the heart of my interpretation of clothes in the novel, of "what is for some queer women and men the highly preferred, habitually chosen, strongly valued, almost sewn-to-the-bone cloth skins that we call clothes." "Almost sewn-to-the-bone cloth skins" is a promising beginning, but our paths divert when Stockton goes from being interested in the "surface to which shame attaches" (Stockton, *Beautiful* 39) to theorizing that shame as adhering to beauty (Stockton, *Beautiful* 41):

> It is more striking to learn, from certain novels, that this debasement clinging to beauty can make the wearer of beautiful garments a martyr to clothes. What can it mean to be martyred for clothes – to believe in your clothes as you suffer from clothes, to bear the wounds that come with clothes, even to give up your very self (but what would that mean?) for the cause of your clothes? (Stockton, *Beautiful* 42).

This focus on "beautiful garments" leads her to have a lot more to say about "not just the sociopolitical disadvantage attached to women's clothes but the bodily and psychic wounding that may powerfully adhere to them" (Stockton, *Beautiful* 44) – with the help of Freud and Radclyffe Hall:[45]

> What *Well*'s readers might have confronted is the shame some women have historically felt (not the discomfort, not the displeasure, but, really, the shame) in having to wear women's clothes, a kind of psychic debasement that runs so deep it seems in excess of a simple preference for wearing men's clothes. Moreover, this shame could eerily match, and therefore newly emphasize, the psychic debasement that men in Hall's time were asked to feel in relation to women's clothes themselves. [...] Without its psychic stigma, Stephen, the novel's mannish lesbian, could not feel such shame in women's dresses. Discomfort, yes. Even a sense of diminished pleasure. But not the humiliation she feels. What might this psychic debasement – as shown in *The Well of Loneliness* – say about a deep-seated stain on the meanings attached to 'normal' women's clothes, even to their acknowledged beauty? [...] Beauty, in this way, may be seen to be a wound (Stockton, *Beautiful* 46).

Stockton argues that what these women are resisting is the "deep-seated stain on the meanings attached to 'normal' women's clothes," a stain having to do with – let us spell it out – "the wound" of castration. The stain of 'normal' women's clothes might be framed less psychoanalytically as simply signaling participation in a heterosexual(ized) economy of desire, sexual availability, femininity. But at any rate, Stockton, in drawing on Freud, much like de Lauretis' reading of *The Well*, produces a reading mostly of the femme, or at least of the femme's clothes. The "humiliation" of women's clothes – and the psychoanalytic take on wearing that mark of castration – is, of course, not actually a reading that tells us anything about the transgender butches in the novel, except, perhaps of their rejection of feminine clothing. In fact, in Stockton's account, masculine clothing appears only as the other thing one opts for when rejecting feminine clothing. For the transgender butches in Feinberg's novel, like for Stephen in Stockton's description of her shame, their very claim to their gender appears to be at stake in the rejection or appropriation of clothes. If we want to have something to say about transgender clothing in this novel, we have to account for their affirmative claim to masculine clothing that is indeed way beyond a "simple preference" and not a mere having to wear something else when there is too much shaming beauty adhering to feminine clothing.

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[45] Reading *The Well of Loneliness* and *Stone Butch Blues* together as Stockton does in her chapter has a long tradition, because they share, as Bobby Noble notes, "stock features, metaphors, and tropes, characters and conventions, yet [are] separated by history, geography, and class" (Noble, *Masculinities* 96).

Stockton reads the transgender butch as part of a butch-femme couple relating through a beauty and sacrifice pairing. She writes about

> Feinberg's sense of sacrifice: the way in which her butch, who is physically wounded because of her clothes, wears her resultant gashes and burns, on her skin, for the sake of her femme, who wears women's clothes (Stockton, *Beautiful* 54f.).

I agree with Stockton's assessment that there is a "sense of sacrifice" in Feinberg's novel. It is just not clear how Stockton comes to the conclusion that this sacrifice is "for the sake of her femme." There are a number of moments of sacrifice that have no bearing on any "sake of her femme" at all. For example, butch Ro's funeral is a moment of humiliation that follows a narrative logic of sacrifice. To attend the ceremony, Ro's friends have to succumb to the straight family's regime of sexual and gender conformity and wear dresses:

> These were burly, big-shouldered he-shes who carried their womanhood in work-roughened hands. They could playfully slap you on the back and send you halfway across the room. Their forearms and biceps were covered with tattoos. These powerful butch women were comfortable in work chinos. Their spirit roared to life when they wore double-breasted suits. Wearing dresses was an excruciating humiliation for them. [...] This clothing degraded their spirit, ridiculed who they were. Yet it was in this painful drag they were forced to say their last goodbye to the friend they loved so much (L. Feinberg 116f.).

While there is a sense of sacrifice here, it is unrelated to beauty or to any dynamics of the couple – unless one wants to use the word couple for the circle of butch friends. "Beauty" and "sacrifice" appear together in a dream Jess has toward the end of the novel, but it is in the context of a somewhat heavy-handed political utopia envisioning a transgender community of "people who were different like me inside" around a campfire:

> We could all see our reflections in the faces of those who sat in this circle. [...] Their faces radiated a different kind of beauty than I'd grown up seeing celebrated on television or in magazines. It's a beauty one isn't born with, but must fight to construct at great sacrifice (L. Feinberg 300).

Sacrifice here appears to be connected to identity, perhaps to surgery (this is left ambiguous in the idea of "construction"), but at any rate it is about finding reflection in this emerging transgender identity, rather than a dynamic in which the beauty itself is wounding as Stockton would have it.

In placing "debasement in the context of seduction" (Stockton, *Beautiful* 3), Stockton fits her reading of *Stone Butch Blues* into a larger project that uses a lens of seduction/desire/sexuality – and decidedly not of (trans-)gender. Stockton's general argument, which views debasement and shame as eroticized, makes for an intriguing reading of the other text in her chapter, Jean Genet's

Querelle, and it surely has its place. But perhaps *Stone Butch Blues* is not the best place. In "interrogating shame – its beautiful, generative, sorrowful debasements that make bottom pleasures so dark and so strange" (Stockton, *Beautiful* 8), Stockton appears to read instances of shame in *Stone Butch Blues* through a pleasure/beauty lens.[46] Viewing the shame and shaming in *Stone Butch Blues* exclusively through an eroticizing/sexual lens ignores the way clothes in the novel appear to be largely associated with (trans-)gender and shame is associated with gender dysphoria. Of course, "sexuality is regulated through the policing and the shaming of gender" (Butler, *Bodies* 238) and it is not always possible or productive to keep gender and sexuality analytically separate, but that does not mean all shaming is sexual. And *Stone Butch Blues* lays a heavy emphasis on clothes as material to gender identity, more than on sexuality. For the unabashed didacticism of the novel, the example of Ethel and Laverne, the heterosexually-identified women who look like butches, serves precisely the purpose of driving home this distinction (L. Feinberg 153).

Stockton, by contrast, argues that "queer acts of clothing" such as in Feinberg's novel use "humiliation" for "attraction and aesthetic delight" (Stockton, "Cloth Wounds" 290). There is certainly a case to be made for the place of clothing in butch-femme erotics, but there is little indication that the aesthetic delight and attraction that butches and femmes in *Stone Butch Blues* take in each other lie in the humiliation and not in other ways that clothes are significant/meaningful. Stockton's assertion that in this novel, there is "nothing more attractive than a beautiful shame" (Stockton, "Cloth Wounds" 289f.) just seems to have little textual basis. The butches in *Stone Butch Blues* are not the most "attractive" to their partners in moments of humiliation, on the contrary, scenes of humiliation and erotic encounters are kept narratively quite separate and at least Jess's partners appear to prefer their partner to be inviolate and untouchable. The ways in which clothes get touched in *SBB* as a novel with several "untouchable" characters[47] offers many examples for a reading in terms of erotic and sexual dynamics, but there is little indication that debasement and shame belong at the core of such an analysis.

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[46] In 1901, sociologist Georg Simmel criticized sexologist Havellock Ellis for reducing shame to sexual shame, insisting there was a "gar nicht zu vereinheitlichende Mannigfaltigkeit der Baeschaemungsgruende" [transl.: *a plurality of reasons for shame not at all possible to unify*] (Simmel 432f.). Silvan Tomkins would agree, as we have seen in chapter II.

Literary critic Cat Moses points to the blurry distinctions between gender, clothing, and the way bodies are inhabited (what Butler calls "significant corporeality") when writing that Jess chooses her clothing

> very carefully because she is more aware than are most of us of its cultural meaning. [...] The way that Jess walks, her voice, the way she holds her body, all attract attention because they are perceived as violating gender norms (Moses 80f.).

The gendered investments of identity that make this butch one with her clothes are what distinguish her transgender identifications from sexuality dressed up in drag: "They don't call the Saturday-night butches he-shes. It means something. It's a way we are different. It doesn't just mean we're... lesbians" (L. Feinberg 148). While certain cross-dressing practices indeed signal "just" lesbian in a heteronomative context, Jess's masculinity and preference of "masculine" attire comes with an urgency that distinguishes it from dressing up as part of a Saturday night party outfit, or a stage or Halloween costume. On such an occasion, men might dress up in tutus for a night to stabilize their "natural" masculinity precisely by failing the costume, by not being a graceful ballerina. A costume is a costume precisely to the extent that the identity attributions it carries are deniable and denied. Stella North writes that: "Though clothing is central to embodied experience, recognition of its importance is always operating under a disavowal" (North 84) – a costume is the extreme, playful, ostentatious case of such disavowal and disavowability.

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[47] Ann Cvetkovich calls Jess's untouchability "the sign of utmost vulnerability and a queer and passionate response to homophobia" (Cvetkovich 79), but in the context of thinking about clothes and skin, it is tempting to read "untouchability" as precisely a refusal of skin and a transfer of its properties onto clothing. I am burying this aspect in the footnote, because, as Halberstam points out, there are serious problems with "untouchability" as a term that too easily slips from a specific kind of sexual practice (or, rather refusal thereof) to "touch" overall – and in following this metaphor from touch to skin, I would participate in what Halberstam argues is a questionable reduction of the stone butch as a sexual identity to a definition by the act s/he does *not* engage in (Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* 123f.).

For the butches in *Stone Butch Blues*, by contrast, masculinity must be claimed and affirmed against normative sex-gender expectations. Their clothes are central to embodied experience, and recognition of its importance for them is recognition of their gender. Having to perform femininity becomes painful and humiliating drag even when it fails: "Four stone butches trying on fashion wigs. It was like Halloween, only it was creepy and painful. The wigs made it look like we were making fun of ourselves" (Moses 143). Moses reads this scene for its transgressive value in destabilizing the sexual binary and its purported naturalness "When butches dressed as women cannot pass as women, the binary categories break down altogether" (Moses 84). But the "creepy and painful" affective character of this scene suggests less the breaking down of binary categories than their breaking impact, the dysphoria they en-gender.

Because they are the fabrics of gender identity, clothes in *Stone Butch Blues* exemplify the polyvalence of discourse Foucault has traced for figures such as “the homosexual” in *The History of Sexuality Vol. I* – what puts you on the spot is also what formats your resistance. On the one hand, clothes make Jess the target of violence, on the other hand, the clothes s/he is (in)vested in are also a source of power and finding/forming community (L. Feinberg 27). This becomes clear even in the very first description (in the letter) of Jess’s preparations for a confrontation with police violence: “We never switched clothing. Neither did our drag queen sisters. [...] We needed our sleeves rolled up, our hair slicked back, in order to live through it” (L. Feinberg 8). Feeling stronger in specific clothes, often described in sartorial detail, is a recurrent theme in scenes of violence. The detailed descriptions of what clothes look like, what they mean (to the wearer and those around), how they are used and what is done to/with them show their importance as bearers of meaning and identitarian investments.

In scenes of violence, Jess protects her clothes, and her clothes protect her gendered sense of self in return:

> I slowly took off my new blue suit coat, folded it neatly, and put it on the piano at the back of the stage. For a moment I considered taking off my tie, thinking somehow it might go easier for me if I did. But, of course, it wouldn’t have. In fact, the tie made me feel stronger in order to face whatever lay ahead of me (L. Feinberg 61).

Later, the leather jacket of Rocco, a butch of “legend,” is the most potent instance of clothing as armor – and of a certain kind of identitarian legacy and transgender foreshadowing. The jacket makes its first powerful appearance in a captivating scene, a scene in which it appears to captivate everyone: “At that moment the bar door opened and everyone fell silent. Standing in the doorway was a mountain of a woman. She wore a black leather jacket unzipped” (L. Feinberg 95). And when Rocco’s ex-lover Edna subsequently gives that same jacket to Jess, it has become symbolically laden with the transgender legacy of Rocco, its original wearer and the person introducing the idea of FTM transitioning to Jess and the readers: "'There's only one thing Rocco had that you don't have. Armor!' Edna handed me a heavy black motorcycle jacket gleaming with silver zippers" (L. Feinberg 215). Edna here clearly identifies the jacket's status as armor and Jess makes a similar observation about clothes earlier in the narrative: "I don't think I could be strong enough to fight without my clothes on" (L. Feinberg 111). Clothes, while often, as Stockton points out, the occasion of violence, are also the armor against it.

Rather than through shame as a "bottom pleasure," perhaps we can think the cloth skins in *Stone Butch Blues* through skin. Stella North argues that clothing is implicit in Didier Anzieu's skin ego and suggests that his concept can be extended to what she calls the "clothing-ego" (North 65f.). She argues "that skin and clothing need to be thought in reciprocal relation" (North 71) and that this has important implications for re-thinking both:

> Skin thus needs to be rethought as clothing-like; stylized, self-reflexive, contingent. Clothing, for its part, needs to be reconceived as skin-like: bodily, proximate, unsurpassable (North 74).

Stone Butch Blues makes a case for what is at stake in such a rethinking for transgender protagonists. Reformulating Anzieu's central formulation about skin, North writes "To be oneself is, first of all, to have clothing that is truly one's own, and secondly, to use it as a space on, and surface in, which one can experience sensations" (North 84f.). Clothes as experiential fabrics are how the transgender butches in *SBB* – to borrow Noble's phrase – "languag[e] themselves differently" (Noble, *Masculinities* 92) against the "naked truth" of sex.

Reading Metaphorical Clothing and Metonymical Skin

As such disparate examples as films about victim-skinning serial killers and revenge-sex-changed rapists and an autobiographically-coded novel about transgender butches show, questions of (trans-)gender are frequently negotiated through talking about skin in terms of clothing and clothing in terms of skin. And as Millot so nicely illustrated by interweaving book imagery into these layers of circulating meaning, what is at issue in skin or clothing is not least the question of what and how one reads when one is looking for gender – which are thought to be signs of gender and which are signs of a more figurative sort, the kind not to be taken at face value.

Clothes and skin then are quite distinct in the ways they function as tropes of gender – even though, or perhaps because, they are often used in each other's place. As we have seen in Benthien above, skin also frequently appears in another place, that of the body. Reading Anzieu's work on skin, Gayle Salamon notes the "common enough synecdoche, in which familiarity or comfort at the level of the skin comes to stand in for a feeling of ease, comfort, or ownership in terms of the entire body" (Salamon, *Assuming* 26). This synecdochal relationship between skin and body is indeed common in transgender memoirs as well. Julia Serano, for example, uses it in writing about her feelings about her body after "starting hormone therapy," when she "slowly began to feel comfortable being in my own skin" (Serano 221). The transgender take on this synecdoche (as a specific case of metonymy) in which skin stands for the entire body reveals an additional link in the metonymic chain: The skin stands for the body and the body stands in particular for the sexed body, which in turn stands for how the body feels/reads in terms of gender. This is the only reason Serano's lessening gender dysphoria can appear and make sense in the trope of "feeling more comfortable being in my own skin." This metonymical relationship between skin, body, and sex is an important key to understanding how rhetorical tropes privilege certain gendered knowledge claims. With a look to how Barbara Johnson and Roman Jakobson write about metaphor and metonymy, I aim to posit a crucial difference between how the tropes of clothing and skin function in relationship to gender: Clothing operates according to a metaphorical logic, while skin operates metonymically – in turn allowing for epistemological for the one, and ontological claims for the other. I will argue that these theories of metaphor and metonymy elucidate why and how transgender knowledge can only be claimed metaphorically.

Barbara Johnson memorably termed metaphor and metonymy "the salt and pepper, the Laurel and Hardy, the Yin and Yang, and often the Scylla and Charybdis of literary theory" (Johnson 155). While I think we might take that as a warning not to fall victim to the false sense of binary wholeness, slapstick comedy, or monstrous deathtrap that these comparisons suggest metonymy and metaphor have become, I do think what Johnson observes about their hierarchical relation is indeed relevant to the way tropes of skin and clothing function: "From Aristotle to George Lakoff, metaphor has always, in the Western tradition, had the privilege of revealing unexpected truth" (Johnson 158). This long rhetorical relationship between metaphor and truth suggests that metaphor lays over truth like clothing, a layer to be peeled back to reveal "unexpected truth." Skin – as numerous transgender memoirs and the role of skin in *The Silence of the Lambs* and *The Skin I live In* suggest – functions according to a metonymical logic when it comes to stand in for bodies and, in particular, the way those bodies are sexed.

Roman Jakobson, whose writings on metaphor and metonymy in their reception perhaps most reflect the salt-and-pepper rise of the pair in literary theory that Johnson notes, writes that metonymy is underexplored and connected to Realist[48] literature:

> It is no mere chance that metonymic structures are less explored than the field of metaphor. Allow me to repeat my old observation that the study of poetic tropes has been directed mainly toward metaphor and that so-called realistic literature, intimately tied to the metonymic principle, still defies interpretation, although the same linguistic methodology that poetics uses when analyzing the metaphorical style of romantic poetry is entirely applicable to the metonymical texture of realistic prose (Jakobson 89f.).

Jakobson's link between metonymy and "realistic prose" and Johnson's claim that metaphor has been linked to truth in the Western tradition might initially seem to be at odds. But the link between metaphor and truth, has, I think, such appeal because metaphor calls for and invites interpretation. Metaphor is at the heart of the hermeneutics of suspicion underlying reading as decoding. And this act of getting to the truth behind the metaphor is what gives it its privileged status. In other words, metaphor reveals "unexpected truth," as Johnson writes – It does so not by itself providing some straightforward truth claim, but through the process of interpretation. It brings to bear certain decodable meanings that appear all the more to be the 'truth' the more they become apparent through the act of interpretation. Metonymy, if we follow Jakobson's claim that it is prevalent in realism, is less associated with interpretation than with hiding the meaning-making process in plain sight. While metaphor draws attention to its poetical character, realist metonymy creates slippage between contiguous things below the radar of stylistic detection. Metonymical relations are naturalized, which makes metonymy the trope of realism – the narrative mode of appearing to be referential rather than revealing, observational rather than symbolic. Metaphor, then, is tied to truth as it is (to be) decoded. – This is precisely the epistemological model that Blumenberg traces in the metaphor of the "naked truth." – Metonymical relations, by contrast, are ones that (as Jakobson claims) are resistant to interpretation and in fact often go unnoticed as intuitive or naturalized. Literary theorist Hugh Bredin writes that metonymy

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[48] "Following the path of contiguous relationships, the Realist author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time. He is fond of synecdochic details" (Jakobson 111).

> relies wholly upon those relations between objects that are habitually and conventionally known and accepted. We must *already know* that the objects are related, if the metonymy is to be devised or understood. Thus, metaphor *creates* the relation between its objects, while metonymy *presupposes* that relation. This is why metonymy can never articulate a newly discovered insight, why it lacks the creative depth of metaphor. Metonymy is irresistibly and necessarily conventional (Bredin 57).

Metonymy relies on relations "already known" and metaphor is the language of creating and articulating "newly discovered insight." Metonymical knowledge claims, then, are ones that are already known, that presuppose the relation they are articulating. Metaphorical knowledge claims, even when they are not "newly discovered," but rather circulating widely, are not "conventionally known and accepted." This difference between metaphorical and metonymical knowledge production suggests that metaphor is so prevalent in transgender rhetorics because gender there is known and claimed in ways not conventionally accepted.

Claudia Benthien traces these different logics of metaphor and metonymy in the two different ways skin is imagined:

> First, there is the idea that the skin encloses the self: skin is imagined as a protective and sheltering cover but in some expressions also as a concealing and deceptive one. What is authentic lies beneath the skin, is hidden inside the body. It escapes our gaze, and its decipherment requires skills of reading and interpretation. Here, skin is conceived of as something other than the self and thus as something foreign and external to it. A second group of sayings equates the skin with the subject, the person: here the essence does not lie beneath the skin, hidden inside. Rather, it is the skin itself, which stands metonymically for the whole human being (Benthien 17).

In the first "word field" Benthien describes, skin is imagined as a clothing-like outer layer according to a metaphorical logic whose "decipherment requires skills of reading and interpretation." In the second set of images, skin stands metonymically for the body, the human being as a whole. For our discussion of metaphor and metonymy, Benthien's examples show that such metaphorical or metonymic logics are not inherent to the tropes of skin or clothing per se – skin can be imagined as clothing and vice versa – but emerge in the ways they are used in particular contexts.

In the context of sex and gender in a sexual binary, the relationship between skin and body and sex is conceptualized as metonymical, while clothing is metaphorical. Moreover, insofar as sex and gender are supposed to cohere, their relationship, too, is supposed to be metonymical – parts of a whole that is not a question of decoding or uncovering, but of being of the same bodily truth (not cloth). As such, as metonymical, they are part of a realist fiction of the sexual binary that requires and receives little interpretation or attention. The metaphorical relationship between gender and clothes, on the other hand, as metaphorical carries truth only insofar as it suggests something to be uncovered and interpreted. It draws attention to itself as a trope of relationship rather than of a whole cloth of truth.

Transgender rhetorics cannot rely on the metonymical logic of sex as gender. Instead, clothing comes to signify gendered truth claims, relying on metaphor and thus drawing attention to the claim as a metaphorical and not a literal one. Of course, metonymy is not any more literal than metaphor; skin is not literally gender (or the body[49]). All of these are tropes, but their non-referential character is occluded to different degrees – and this difference matters when it comes to having one's gender questioned and/or having to rhetorically produce gender through means that betray their rhetoricity more readily.

When Prosser writes that "with a wonderfully uncomplicated literalism Didier Anzieu renders Freud's 'surface' as the skin" (Prosser, *Second Skins* 65), I am struck less by Anzieu's rendering of Freud (and its accuracy or lack thereof) than by what the passage reveals about Prosser's appreciation for a "wonderfully uncomplicated literalism." *Second Skins* is animated by an interpretive strategy of "wonderfully uncomplicated literalism," one that opens Prosser to Love's (as I have argued in ch. III not altogether fair) criticism when it comes to his reading of *The Well*. As we have seen in this disagreement on *The Well*, not all of Prosser's resulting interpretations are actually "literal" – nor is that a particularly useful categorization given the highly questionable distinction between literal, taken-to-be referential forms of language and those taken to be marked as metaphorical or otherwise non-literal. In fact, Prosser problematizes literal readings of transgender bodies and transgender in his discussion of *Stone Butch Blues* as "thinly disguised autobiography:"

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[49] Steven Connor draws attention to the metonymy and its trope character in *The Book of Skin*: "Skin has come to mean the body itself; it has become the definite article, the 'the' of the body. But skin is not the body" (Connor 29).

> A ‘thin disguise,’ the fictional dimension of *Stone Butch Blues* thwarts the transparency, the naked literalism that characterizes the scene of reading autobiography (the book = the life): a literalism that would otherwise be redoubled when the scene involves reading that even more exceptional specimen, the transgendered subject (Prosser, *Second Skins* 194).

In analogizing “the specificity of the transgendered narrative” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 185) with *SBB*’s occupying “a form between fiction and autobiography, a trans- or intergeneric space” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 191), Prosser reads the book by its cover (his argument uses the author’s photograph on the back and painted image on the front cover of the first edition). But he also demonstrates that he is keenly aware that a ‘literal’ reading that presumes to read gender off of the body or have a synechdochical relationship between skin, body, sex (and gender), is detrimental to transgender truth claims. The “naked facts” of literalism “strip off the truth,” he writes in allusion to the story of the stripped-down butch in the beginning of *Stone Butch Blues*:

> [F]iction clothes the naked body narrative of the transgendered subject in a kind of truth while autobiography strips it down to the facts and in the process strips off the truth. Autobiography seeks to ‘find out who you are,’ to reveal the naked facts of the subject; fiction conceals enough of the facts so that the truth can be read (Prosser, *Second Skins* 192f.).

In light of Prosser’s own skepticism toward the ‘literal’ and the implications of metonymical and metaphoric logics for transgender tropes of skin and clothing, I think we should, rather than dismissing Prosser’s project of reading trans narratives – or *The Well* – as too literal, understand the “wonderfully uncomplicated literalism” as a yearning for a rhetorical gesture toward what is, as Bredin puts it “conventionally known and accepted,” a yearning for metonymical knowledge effects. Jay Prosser’s *Second Skins* then is, in its very title and rewriting of Anzieu,[50] an attempt to access what passes for literalism in the metonymical skin of cis-gendered truth claims. As such, it draws attention to the unequal distribution of suspicion in how gender is read – to which cover is allowed to stand metonymically for which book, and which is not.

The reading practices of this dissertation are in many ways themselves involved in reading metaphorically, even if they are not after a substantive truth about transgender to be uncovered there, but rather about the way gender is read and demands transgender knowledge production. Because such knowledge cannot be knowledge of gender to be read off or from under the surfaces to which it is being attached in the same gesture, it emerges instead as dysphoric knowledge, as the affectively known contradiction in this rhetorical production.

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[50] When Marc Lafrance notes that "second skins," which are "defensive," "aggressive acts" in Anzieu, have been "critically re-read and re-thought in ways that avoid these pathologizing propensities," Jay Prosser is his prime example of such a re-thinking (Lafrance 30).

V. Feminist Subjects: Peter Pan & the (Neo-)Vagina Monologues

While the preceding chapters are all about gender dysphoric tropes in a general sense, this chapter will discuss tropes that are used in gender-specific ways, or that are, if you will, specifically transmasculine and transfeminine tropes. It will do so not to trace gender specificity as such, but rather to discuss the ways in which these claims to specific genders challenge certain versions of feminism on their underlying visions of who gets to be a feminist subject. What happens when trans women use the language of empowering feminine/female embodiment? Does their use of such language challenge the underlying assumptions of how women's bodies are defined and how bodies and identities are supposed to cohere? Does the proliferation of transmen's claims to masculinity in the face of the particular incitement to speak gender put them at odds with feminist expectations of basing politics on expanding rather than rejecting women's gender roles? Taking *The Vagina Monologues* and the figure of the boy/boi as examples, this chapter will argue that feminist reactions to trans claims to gender specificity, even when those are framed as feminist by those that make them, show that some feminisms assume that ultimately only certain bodies and certain gender identities can speak as feminists. Against such resistance that misreads trans claims to gender specificity as per se anti-feminist, I argue that, on the contrary, these tropes often call for and enact a transinclusive feminism.

Before turning to those examples, I want to clarify why I am not analyzing transgender binaries themselves, but rather their feminist responses and effects on feminism. Gender specificity in terms of gender difference has indeed received some attention in Transgender Studies and in feminist studies of transgender phenomena. Zowie Davy asserts that

> transmen's commitment to a male identity is corporeally and discursively constituted in different ways to transwomen's commitment to a female identity. This may sound like an obvious claim but it is one that needs clarifying in relation to bodily aesthetics (Davy 69).

The first part of this passage is a point very salient to my project insofar as it highlights the discursive commitment to gender identities that characterizes transgender – and it should indeed be something of an "obvious claim" considering the cultural framework of a binarist construction of gender and sex within which these trans/genders appear. However, this seeming obviousness needs clarifying beyond the level of "bodily aesthetics" as if "corporeally" and "discursively" existed on completely separate levels. The work is not done by positing gender-specificity and using gender, again, as self-explanatory [à la transwomen are from Mars, transmen are from Venus… or is it the other way around?]: As the monsters, mirrors, and ghosts have shown, there are indeed numerous and ubiquitous tropes that do not follow strictly gender-specific lines.

To do a rhetorical investigation tracing transgender binaries in the ways certain tropes are used, one could, for instance, do a reading of how bodily modification gets figured differently for trans men and trans women. Eva Hayward's (Hayward, "Lessons") and Susan Stryker's (Stryker, "Surgeon") writings about the surgeon and the surgical cut could be contrasted to the numerous transmasculine references to self-making – from the title of Henry Rubin's book to Lori Petcher's documentary film *A Self-made Man* (2013). Indeed, Rubin calls the classification of "reconstructive and cosmetic surgeries" a "gendered distinction" and argues that this is why trans men tend to refer to their surgeries as "reconstructive" (Rubin, *Self-Made Men* 60). One could work out the respective codings and negotiations of gender stereotypes of activity and passivity in these references to surgeries between submitting to the surgeon's knife on the one hand and the idea of self-making on the other. The resultant finding that trans claims to gender identifications follow the larger cultural codings of those genders would not be particularly surprising.

And so, if I will not pursue this line of analysis, it is in part because it seems that Davy and many others are already busy looking for and thereby always re-finding and neatening gender differences. Davy painstakingly differentiates trans men's and trans women's "body projects," (Davy 11) leaving her reader to wonder what really is learnt from specifying surgical procedures or the use of make-up *as* gender differences. Critiquing gender binaries when found in transgender phenomena (where they, of course, appear precisely because trans people face an intensified pressure to produce gender rhetorically to override assigned meanings of sex) is probably one of the main ways in which feminist readings of transgender have gone wrong – not just for Mary Daly and Sheila Jeffreys (Jeffreys). I will also avoid this approach, because Judith Butler rightly warns us that it blunts gender as a category of analysis:

> To assume that gender always and exclusively means the matrix of the 'masculine' and 'feminine' is precisely to miss the critical point that the production of the coherent binary is contingent, that it comes at a cost, and that

> those permutations of gender which do not fit the binary are as much a part of gender as its most normative instance (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 42).

While this chapter will have two sections, talking about a transfeminine and a transmasculine trope, it will try to be mindful of the variety of permutations of gender for which these tropes have meaning. Their histories and feminist chronologies are notably different: As will become apparent below, the boi as a trans/genderqueer trope appears in the context of more recent queer and trans communities and is mostly discussed by lesbian and queer-feminist authors wondering about the place of masculinity in feminism. *The Vagina Monologues* is a mainstream, commodified phenomenon based on a 1990s play that echoes 1970s feminist theater and empowerment rhetorics and has simultaneously grown in tune with 21st-century governance feminism when it comes to its global agenda as part of V-Day and human rights politics. *The Vagina Monologues* and the figure of the boi/y are also not a matched, contrasting pair of tropes. Their discursive sites and functions are very different and so they will hopefully not be readable as a "coherent binary." After all, there are boys with vaginas.

There are numerous important transgender tropes and rhetorical sites that are not featured here and would be beyond the scope of this project. In choosing dysphoric knowledge as the main analytic prism, this project has necessarily only focused on a selective set of transgender tropes. And like the larger project, this chapter, even if it ventures beyond gender dysphoria, looks at selective examples through a specific lens: To see what rhetorical and political effects are generated when trans people use binary gendered language, e.g. when they claim boyhoods or vaginas. Often, such rhetorical moments make transgender identities the *object* of feminist analysis and criticism, since as non-naturalized uses of such language, they are understood to be all the more blatantly rhetorical, rendering themselves so easily to paranoid readings of reproduction vs. subversion of the sexual binary. This chapter, by contrast, will wonder about what such language means for the possibility of transgender feminist *subjects*.

In particular, the chapter will look at how trans women's participation in Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* exposes the contradictions of making the vagina a central trope of a play with a purportedly inclusive feminist agenda. Whether and how trans women are included in or excluded from the feminist activism surrounding and the ideas of womanhood circulating in the play are questions that are symptomatic of larger debates about the place of transfemininity in feminism. While the *Vagina Monologues*' organizing metaphor raises questions about whether trans women can enter a feminism so defined and what happens when they do, *Peter Pan* and the figure of the boy/i are subject to journalistic and academic debate about the place of transmasculinity in feminism, about whether these masculine identifications circulating in transgender writing, lesbian, queer and BDSM communities automatically mean an exit from feminism, whether masculine identification is anti-feminist. In both cases, at the heart of the ways in which trans people's gender identifications get read by some of these feminist responses as immediately related to feminist politics is the question of who gets to speak as a feminist.

The Vagina Monologues: Trans women and the speculum of empowerment

> *The Neovagina Monologues* was inspired by Eve Ensler's work, obviously in regard to the title but also because the very idea of a multiply marked and problematic organ which bears witness can't help but take an ironic twist when reframed within a specifically Trans vocality: Neovagina, the technical term for a surgically constructed vagina, is a vexed, postmodern construct which, although firmly grounded in the realities of bodies and lived experience, until quite recently could only speak within contemporary medico-legal-technological discourses -- and at present seems to have an awful lot to say (Stone, "The Neovagina Monologues")

Sandy Stone presents a clip of her 2008 performance of her one-woman play "The NeoVagina Monologues" on her website with the introductory words in the epigraph. From that clip, it appears that the most obvious and crucial difference between Stone's take and Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* is the place of the vagina trope in it. The opening of Stone's *NeoVagina Monologues* is the opening of a transgender life story – and it starts in the vagina, leading from the embryo in the womb through early childhood up to grammar school. Much of what this neo-vagina monologue has to say makes no mention of vaginas. Notably, Stone's opening is not concerned with questions of sexuality, sexual violence, and vaginas. It is, however, very concerned about questions of memory, narrative, and invention:

> One of the wonderful things about memory is it's so tricky. You never know if what you're remembering is real, if it really happened. And you can use that to your advantage a lot of the time. And I did. We did. We all did (Stone, "The Neovagina Monologues").

Quoting Monique Wittig's line to "[m]ake an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent," Stone explains her efforts to "create the future by remembering a past that never existed." The *NeoVagina Monologues*, in their opening, are speaking in the place of ghostly temporality – a trope that should be familiar from the transgender ghosts of chapter III. Stones' *NeoVagina Monologues* suggest a monologist who reads and invents. It is unclear from immediate context of the line "We all did" who this "we" is. Is it all people with neo-vaginas, is it everyone, is it Stone and everyone in the audience? The very ambiguity of who is speaking and spoken to distinguishes the strict binary identitarian roles for participants and audience members that Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* sets up: Women and Men – distributed neatly along the lines of vaginas on the one hand and on the other an internally split camp of rapists and vagina connoisseurs.

For Stone, it is clear that Eve Ensler's central vagina trope for the monologues "can't help but take an ironic twist when reframed within a specifically Trans vocality" and thus she produces her own neo-vagina monologues in response. But what happens when Ensler's play – and Ensler herself – takes such an ironic twist head-on? What happens to the vaginal trope in transgender rhetorics and how do transgender women fit into the rhetorical structures of the play and its vision of feminism?

We can answer these questions using *Beautiful Daughters*, a documentary film chronicling Ensler's writing of an additional monologue for the first ever production of *The Vagina Monologues* with an all-transgender women cast in 2004. The film cross-cuts between scenes of Ensler interviewing the trans women about their lives and coming-out stories, scenes of arrival at the airport for Ensler and many of the women "from all over the country" and clips from the auditions and rehearsal periods, as well as scenes from a group discussion between Ensler and the performers and scenes from a few of the women's (home or activist) lives.

While the trans women participate in the consciousness-raising like setting of the group discussion, talking about violence and bullying experiences, the group discussion is less a moment for the women to speak to each other than a forum for them to educate Eve Ensler. Ensler, who is frequently shown in the role of listener, asker, researcher, giver of hugs after interviews, and overall compassionate audience stand-in, exclaims at one point in the group scene: "No, I got it, I finally got it!" This epiphany – concerning the fact that these trans women are women – might be a moment of personal revelation and ally-educational triumph, but it certainly shines a problematic light on the way Ensler's privilege structures the way these women can and will speak in the play. Their participation in the play and in what Christine Cooper calls the "particularly consumable form of feminism and activism" (Cooper 727) that it represents is dependent upon educating Ensler and letting her reframe their experiences so that they can be absorbed by a larger homogenizing, vagina-centric discourse that "fosters epistemological equivalence between women" downplaying differences (Cooper 744). The women in *Beautiful Daughters* go through the motions of a feminist theater troupe working in a consciousness-raising style group setting, but the only consciousness that is being raised is Ensler's – and it is being raised to a level that all the trans women were starting from. One might imagine a version of collective theater making and a consciousness raising group discussion between these trans women that treats them not just as openers of Eve Ensler's mind, a scenario in which the forms that *Vagina Monologue* productions draw on from the play's feminist theater predecessors, are put into practice. As it functions here, the group discussion experience is not one designed to foreground the women's stories or their listening to each other. Insofar as they do, this is a mere side effect of educating Ensler.

Shelly Scott makes a case for situating the *Vagina Monologues* "within the context of early feminist theatre collectives" and "revisiting the impact of consciousness-raising" on the off-mainstream forerunners of Ensler's play. Scott argues that "groups like At the Foot of the Mountain and the Women's Experimental Theater made *The Vagina Monologues* possible" (Scott 404). This is more than a question of the history of feminist theater. There are, of course, obvious differences between feminist theater collectives producing and writing plays in collaborative groups and the beginnings of Ensler's play as a one-woman show. However, it is certainly true that as the one-woman show becomes "V-Day" – "a global movement to end violence against women and girls," an organization tightly and centrally orchestrating through the script, campaign packages, and director's instructions how "local volunteers and college students produce annual benefit performances" ("About V-Day") – the play's production and its staging with groups of performers inhabits more and more the forms and some of the rhetorical strategies of collective feminist theatre making and consciousness-raising.

Scott writes that the "consciousness-raising group was an integral part of the rehearsal process for many feminist theatre collectives" (Scott 412). With an emphasis on "the act of sharing personal stories," these collectives also emphasized the connection to the spectators: "The philosophy was that by relating their own feelings, actors would create a safe environment for spectators to share as well" (Scott 413). The function of the personal story in consciousness raising is paradoxical, as Richard Dyer explains in *Now You See It*. While "centering on the individual speaker," the expectation of a "repetition of stories" creates an "insistent perception of sameness within difference" (Dyer 230). Ensler's creation of a composite trans woman monologue using snippets from her interviews operates precisely from such a "sameness within difference" lens – and embeds the resultant single voice of trans women in the larger play that combines a series of monologues that, in turn, is driven by the "sameness within difference" of women (with vaginas). This paradox between women and womanhood, women and the voice of one woman is clear in the way Ensler has commented on the play from its beginning:

> *The Vagina Monologues* focuses on both celebrating womanhood and describing victimization. Ensler has said that the function of art is to let people tell their own stories, and when she performs the monologues as a one-woman show, the stories of those women she has encountered are shared through her (Scott 413).

Shelly Scott comments that "the political nature of the piece changes when it becomes a campus production, with a cast of twelve to fourteen" (Scott 413). As she notes, the political nature changes because it is now a production with a larger number of performers and rather than their own voices, the monologues become characters. The political nature also changes drastically because the V-Day machinery puts strict limits on what can be done with the script, effectively preventing any personalization, any adaptation to a particular place or group of performers, any additions or subtractions.

This one group of transgender women in conversation with Ensler is then only a particularly illustrative example of how the ways the *Vagina Monologues* are produced at least in part take the form and the rhetorics of traditional feminist activism like consciousness raising and a somewhat naïve notion of empowerment, and fill them with patronizing privilege. In so doing, the play paradoxically manages to replicate both the homogenizing, essentializing aspects of what was powerful but often problematic about consciousness raising as a group practice and to replace most of the radically democratic creative possibilities of collective work with a hierarchical structure of distributing a script with explicit guidelines for performance, editing, and use.

In the group discussion of *Beautiful Daughters*, Ensler invokes the spirit of "global sisterhood," in which "I'll show up for you and you'll show up for me," but the rhetorical appeal of this promise is not supported by the way Ensler seems to be positioned to deal out the membership cards to this sisterhood. In fact, her personal change of heart on the issue of trans women is chronicled in the publication history of the *Vagina Monologues*. In 2001, Ensler wrote in the V-Day edition:

> Whenever I have tried to write a monologue to serve a politically correct agenda, for example, it always fails. Note the lack of monologues about menopause or transgendered women. I tried. The *Vagina Monologues* is about attraction, not promotion (Ensler xxvi–xxvii; K. Q. Hall 106).

Somehow, and thankfully for Adams and her fellow *Beautiful Daughters*, including transgender women moved from a politically correct (and thus apparently creatively unattractive) issue of "promotion" to being attractive to Ensler in 2004. This extremely personal approach was probably an intriguing feature of the original, personal style of the one-person play that Ensler wrote and performed herself. She wrote and inhabited the composite characters of her monologues along the lines of her own empathy. For the play of the 2000s, the play that has become part of the large-scale operation of V-Day's feminist activism,[51] the political implications of not just who and what is able to exert enough attraction to become part of a feminist agenda, but of the fact that inclusion should depend on catering to Ensler's sense of "attraction," are less benign. "Attraction not promotion" could also be a quote or an echo of the 11th of Alcoholics Anonymous' "Twelve Traditions:" "Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion."[52] In that case, Ensler's statement is less about attraction as her personal filter, but the passage is then either saying that writing about trans women or menopause would be overly self-promotional, or that the play addresses whoever is attracted to it without promoting it to them specifically by inclusion. The problem is, however, that Ensler's play is attractive insofar as it sees itself as creating a feminist community in the spirit of sisterhood precisely because of its promise of inclusion.

This relationship between attraction and inclusion is immediately evident in the words of Calpernia Adams when she explains toward the beginning of the documentary to one of the auditioning trans women – as much as to the viewers – her investment in the project: "These stories and issues, you know, resonate in our own lives, too: violence, discrimination… So, I think this is so amazing, this new monologue is going to add a place at the table for us." That place at the table of the official *Vagina Monologues* for trans women ultimately remains contingent. The trans-themed monologue has not been included in the official script for the yearly V-Day campaigns, but is one of the "optional monologues," only one of which can be chosen per production (V-Day operates with set rules and directives that for the local directors and organizers in staging and adaptation of the play). V-Day rules leave it up to each production of *The Vagina Monologues* to (re-)negotiate the place of trans women in their vision of feminism and their decisions around whether a (and what kind of) vagina is required for a vagina monologue. What makes this important is the way it matches the way many feminist spaces and organizations have handled the question of trans women: As a question. Trans women's membership and inclusion is subject to debate, decision, and potential controversy. Their participation is negotiable and it is – when negotiated under the banner of sameness – not to transform any of the terms or politics.

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[51] According to V-Day's website, "V-Day generates broader attention for the fight to stop violence against women and girls, including rape, battery, incest, female genital mutilation (FGM), and sex slavery. […] In 2012, over 5,800 V-Day benefit events took place produced by volunteer activists in the U.S. and around the world, educating millions of people about the reality of violence against women and girls" (http://www.vday.org/about).

[52] http://www.aa.org/bigbookonline/en_appendicei.cfm

Ensler author(ize)s the new trans monologue. In selecting particular passages from her interviews and forming them into a new narrative, Ensler does more than transcribe notes. The importance of her hand in the new monologue is exemplified by the two different titles. The film about the all-trans production takes its title from a part of the new trans monologue, in which someone at church tells the monologist's mother that she has "a beautiful daughter." In the monologue, this marks a moment of closure and triumph for the trans woman, a moment of social recognition and inclusion in a setting that would normally be expected to be unwelcoming and a scene of rejection. The monologue's title, however, is very different: "They Beat The Girl Out Of My Boy… Or So They Tried." The monologue's title, then, focuses on a moment of violence (a beating by bullies) – and while it may end with a somewhat resilient note, in which the bullies did not succeed, in lifting this sentence's complicated perspective with a particularly confusing structure (the girl out of my boy) from one of the interviews, from a moment when one of the women was explaining the mindset of her attackers, the title still foregrounds both physical violence and the violence of the assumption of there having been a boy one might try to beat the girl out of. While the monologue itself replicates a linear transitional scenario and maps that onto the empowerment narrative that is characteristic of the larger didactic structure of the *Vagina Monologues* that ends with a beautiful (and vagina-having) daughter, the multiple voices in *Beautiful Daughters* have a different story to tell.

One glimpse of what these different stories might be comes when Valeria Spencer, the only trans woman of color to be featured at length throughout the film, addresses Ensler during a group discussion scene: "Some women, Eve, have penises! Good Afternoon? Good afternoon! Some women have penises and I am one of them!" *Beautiful Daughters* then immediately cuts to Spencer performing one of the original *Vagina Monologue*'s parts during rehearsals: "If my vagina could talk…" It is an energetic performance that gets applause in this scene of rehearsal from her fellow performers watching and will be a rousing moment in the stage production at the end of the film. But what Spencer cannot express through Ensler's script is the very irony of this constellation. The exclusion of precisely her position – as a woman not only whose vagina does not speak but whose rhetorical authorization as a speaker through this hypothetical just does not quite work – from what makes it into the new trans monologue as well as the overall “first all-transgender” production of the play silences what is most important and most impactful about trans inclusion in the first place: Trans women’s participation highlights that they relate to the experiences of womanhood which the metaphorical vagina offers in Ensler’s play and yet are excluded from the metonymical, vaginal definition of womanhood and feminism (that the play grounds many of its claims for sameness on) for having or having had “penises.” For trans voices to truly be included in the play and its feminist agenda, the play would have to consider the essentialism and exclusions at its core.

The new trans monologue is only one way in which the group of trans women in *Beautiful Daughters* occupy their own place at the table, only one way in which they attempt to inhabit the rhetorical space of the vagina (monologues). The other is, of course, their performance of the whole play, their playing of the roles of all the other monologues. Adams is excited about the place at the table as much as about the fact that, as she says, “*The Vagina Monologues* is a celebration of the emotional aspects of being a woman.” Christine Cooper argues that “in both their form and their content, the monologues reduce their speakers to versions of the same, whatever the patina of diversity adorning their surface” (Cooper 729). This is an important point of criticism, but it is also, paradoxically, part of the appeal of the play for transgender women. While reflecting the genital logics of gender attribution in society at large, the *Vagina Monologues* offer an opportunity to sound like a version of the same to transgender women performing the play. As such, the play gives these women an opportunity to reduce the often violently enforced and policed difference between them and cisgender women.

Acting in the various monologues allows these trans women to explore and celebrate, as Adams says, the "emotional aspects" – and to attempt to highlight them over the differences between them as people and the various roles they perform in the play. Of course, this makes their situation not so very different from the usual divergence between cast members and the subjectivities represented in the characters of the play. Especially in the yearly, ever-growing series of college-level performances, the people acting frequently do not share any age, socioeconomic, or ethnic identities with the characters they play. The vaginas they speak for often have little in common with the ones they may (or may not) have. When a college student who had barely been born then portrays the composite Muslim rape victim character in the Bosnian War of the early 1990s, it becomes clear that there are numerous layers of the problem of who speaks for women in a play that sets out to collect women's monologues under the sign of the vagina.

Especially when it comes to the global feminist agenda of many of V-Day's campaigns (including delegation trips to Israel, Palestine, Egypt and Jordan, the Afghan Women's Summit, and India)[53] and some of the play's monologues and surrounding activism, this discrepancy between performer and role is also reflected in the way the text structures the monologues. Srimati Basu in her essay "V is for Veil" questions "the depiction of the 'global' body in *TVM*" and comes to the conclusion that the monologues on non-U.S. subjects work differently from the U.S. ones: "Unlike the U.S. monologues, the non-U.S. pieces are not first-person narratives," rather, Basu argues, they are

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[53] http://www.vday.org/about

> 'ventriloqual' moves of *TVM* around these questions, as performers project, render experiences, ad speak 'for' women assumed to be invisible and silent, thereby foregrounding the cultural assumptions and political imperatives of the writers' and performers' locations (Basu 33).

Basu is certainly right in problematizing how some of the monologues are more ventriloqual than others. But we can also borrow her term to think about the fact that all of the monologues are ventriloqual to a certain degree. It seems their very ventriloquism (while significantly dampening the impact of the new transgender monologue once the women's words are routed through Ensler's perspective) offers an entry point for transgender women into the circulating spirit of sisterhood the play wants to ostensibly generate and into a rhetorical womanhood that it locates in the vagina. This is what attracts trans women to the play even in the face of the ironic effects of the location of this rhetorical womanhood.

Making the vagina the key structuring metaphor of the play produces the main ironic twist for trans women, but it has been criticized from various other angles, as well. In her essay "Queerness, Disability, and *The Vagina Monologues*," Kim Hall is "concerned about how *The Vagina Monologues* establishes the vagina as a sign of feminist embodiment, subjectivity, and ultimately empowerment for women" (K. Q. Hall 100). Focusing her critique mainly on the marginalization of intersexed bodies, Hall writes:

> the absence of any intersex experiences is an effect of the gendered bodily norms operating in Ensler's text. In fact, it is precisely its celebration of the normative vagina that has contributed to the mainstream appeal and success of *The Vagina Monologues*. The idea that women are ultimately beings with vaginas despite other differences among women appeases a mainstream society and a feminist

> movement that have been challenged by transgender and intersex theory and activism (K. Q. Hall 107).

Hall not only criticizes the problematic implications of fusing the vagina and the subject of feminism, she also insists that this is precisely what contributes to the resounding success of the play. Appeasing the mainstream, *Vagina Monologues* becomes more easily marketable and its ways of identifying and homogenizing women map onto larger cultural notions and are thus easily understood. This not only makes the play ideologically easy to swallow, it constitutes, as Hall pointedly observes, the narrative force of the play.

> the narrative force of *The Vagina Monologues* is the ability of the normative vagina to appropriate different women's experiences and yet still produce the same story of the 'normal' female body as a body with a vagina (K. Q. Hall 108).

It is rhetorically powerful because it draws on and reinforces the ways women and gender are known and understood. Based on this foundation, the message of female empowerment and against sexual violence is merely "another narrative rehabilitation of the norms of heteropatriarchal female embodiment" (K. Q. Hall 115).

The ways the *Vagina Monologues* continue to simultaneously invite trans women to take up their rhetorics and to exclude what they might have to say are nicely illustrated by what Westport News reporter Meg Barone writes about local trans activist Ann Faith Beon's participation in the Westport, CT production of the *Vagina Monologues* in 2011:

> The play is powerful and empowering, and Beon said perhaps even more so for her 'because of the distance I had come to be there, in life, not geographically.' Only after Beon's gender reassignment surgery in November 2009 did she have a vagina (Barone).

"Only after Beon's gender reassignment surgery in November 2009 did she have a vagina" is a sentence that crystallizes how the neo-vagina does not quite fit in – too new, too "only after," itself the symbol of "the distance" Beon has come to be in the *Vagina Monologues*. Note that Beon's own framing of her transition quoted in the article is one of a spatial, temporal, developmental kind of travel trope, but not one that directly marks surgery as its endpoint or explicitly relates her genital status to her performance in the play. The journalist's "only after" makes clear that she is certain that a vagina is what makes one eligible to participate in the play (no metaphorical vaginas or re-signified genitals here). The sentence also seems to suggest that the state of Boen's neo-vagina is fair game for journalism, while we learn nothing about the particular vaginas or genital configurations of any of the other performers in the production. Boen's vagina now authorizes her to perform in this particular iteration of the play, but her vagina is spoken about more than it will get to monologize.

The neo-vagina doesn't actually speak much in the new monologue or the film, either. It seems like both film and playwright are aware that the metaphor of vagina can be used by trans women, but the effects it produces are different. Even sexuality, which, along with violence, is certainly one of the centerpieces of most of the monologues' addressing of vaginal functioning, is somehow left out, at least on the graphic, frank, and detailed level that the monologues were ostensibly freeing women to talk about. If, as Christine Cooper criticizes, "the vagina stands primarily as a sign of sexuality, and sexuality is made the very core of women's identities" (Cooper 732) in the *Vagina Monologues*, then this is yet another way in which transgender women do not quite get to occupy the voice of the vagina (however problematic that in itself might be, as Cooper points out).

In fact, talking vaginas have a long literary history precisely of being connected to Enlightenment ideas of freedom. Aram Vartanian writes in the introduction to the English translation of Denis Diderot's 1748 book *The Indiscreet Jewels*:

> The voice of his 'jewels' functions, provocatively and subversively, as a general metaphor for the voice of 'enlightenment' itself. In the novel, the sexuality of women, repressed since time immemorial by hypocrisies, controls, and orthodoxies of every kind – religious, moral, social, esthetic, and political – joins forces with the new philosophical spirit of the age to break the silence imposed by tradition and custom, and, by so doing, to challenge established authority, awaken dulled curiosity, transgress the boundaries of consecrated prejudice, and gratify stifled desire in the spheres of cultural no less than sexual experience (Diderot ix f.).

What makes these talking vaginas anything but feminist is that "the sexuality of women" is freed from repression against the women's will, frequently exposing their infidelities and betraying their secrets with unwanted consequences. The novel's sultan uses a ring that literally compels the vaginas to speak: "Every woman toward whom you turn the stone will recount her intrigues in a loud, clear, and intelligible voice. But do not imagine that they shall speak through their mouths" (Diderot 13). Basing a story on women being forced to speak sexually against their will is not too far from a rape metaphor. While this set-up is quite clearly marked as satire meant to ridicule "religious, moral, social, esthetic, and political" hypocrisy in a libertine spirit, its basic structure of making vaginas speak at the expense of women's consent is as far from *The Vagina Monologues* as possible. Nevertheless, the two texts have something in common: Both connect breaking silence and challenging authority through sexual speech based in an investment in Enlightenment ideas of freedom. Both texts, ultimately, style their sexually explicitness as a revolution against repression. Of course, Michel Foucault warns us against following this "repressive hypothesis" (Foucault, *HoS I* 10) that suggests sex is not spoken about and instead wants

> to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said (Foucault, *HoS I* 11).

Ensler's and Diderot's talking vaginas, despite their radically different contexts and politics, are then part precisely of this speaking of sex, this proliferation of discourse that is not breaking any silence.

If *The Vagina Monologues* are about breaking silence, the neo-vagina still does not speak. This is not to say that it should (for the sake of Enlightenment and freedom), but to note, as Foucault suggests, who is doing the speaking. In *Beautiful Daughters*, the closest moment to addressing what a neo-vagina might have to say (on any even nearly as graphically descriptive level as the one the play celebrates for some of its vaginas) occurs in a scene of one of the women being asked about her first post-surgical sexual experience by a group of college students she is speaking to as a transgender activist – in a moment of the documentary that is not directly connected to the performance or new addition to the *Vagina Monologues*. And, in fact, the trans woman answers evasively and refuses to be reduced to highlighting her difference from cis-gender or non-op people by going into surgical or anatomical detail. She seems acutely aware that the speculum of empowerment that seems to animate some of the *Vagina Monologues'* rhetorical moves (and is perhaps even an apt term for how the play makes vaginas speak) does not work the same way for her. This speculum of empowerment logic, echoing ideas of the feminist health movement's self-examination workshops, suggests that learning about one's vagina, creating visibility – to oneself and others – is empowering. It suggests that breaking the silence surrounding vaginas is feminist, empowering, and a source of community building. As a trans woman, the activist in the lecture hall cannot invest in speaking as a breaking of silence, in explicitness and visibility as freedom. Instead of empowering her, its effect is that of a mirror of dysphoria that makes her body the object of judgment and categorization, threatens to render her claim to womanhood contingent and negotiable through exposing her vagina's differences (anatomical, historical, or symbolical) and potentially distancing her from other women. While the effects of highlighting her difference from other women and the different ways in which she has to claim her gender are particular to trans women, the injurious potential of graphic language is, of course, not exclusive to trans women. As the *Indiscreet Jewels* remind us, not every talking vagina is feminist. The empowerment message of the "cunt cheer" that the play celebrates is highly context-dependent, but established in the play because the sexist devaluation of vaginas and the violent uses of the term "cunt" are what the play is explicitly fighting and reclaiming terms against. This is a context that the play does not establish for neo-vaginas (or trans women's non-op genitals).

The particular injurious potential of speaking frankly about neo-vaginas in graphic detail is easily demonstrated if one is willing to venture into one of the more vile corners of the Internet. Graphic description – including a medical drawing – is precisely what the "femonade" blog, part of a radical feminist collective blog hub, uses for a transphobic post about neo-vaginas and what the anonymous blogger “factcheckme” imagines a neo-vagina monologue to sound like. The grammatical and spelling errors add to the overall unedited impression of this rant. While it would be difficult to use the formulation that the passage is “worth” quoting at some length, the blog post is nevertheless exemplary of one extreme end of the genital logics of vagina = woman. Christine Cooper describes as one of the “problematic elisions” in the *Vagina Monologues* that the vagina becomes “a part of the body and a particular subset of experience standing in for the whole of female consciousness. [...] One’s vagina is necessarily one’s female self” (Cooper 732). The femonade blog shows where such an elisions can lead and suggests why having the neo-vagina speak in the same graphic register as the others in the *Vagina Monologues* would require questioning some of the ways in which the play’s central organizing trope functions:

> “the neo-vagina monologues” wouldnt take long. “hi, i am a neo-vagina. i am new here. i used to be an organ, and i was part of a functioning male genito-urinary system. now, i am good for just one thing: being penetrated! by men!” because theres no history there. [...] but mens fetishistic thinking about women’s fuckholes vaginas doesnt make an organ out of mere tissue. and no matter how emasculated feminine one feels for cutting off their dick, “feelings” dont equal “experience.” nothing can turn a hollowed-out dickskin into a babymaker. its just cant. the lack of shared history between neo-vaginas and born-womens pussies is proof that the owners of neo-vags arent women. they are men. of course, men always talk, even when they have nothing important to say. so its entirely possible that a talking neo-vag would go on and on. but like men, it would just be wasting born-womens time with its baseless, irrelevant shit. and it would be a complete bore as a play, because having no history, and no substance, the experience of a neo-vagina wouldnt engage you, wouldnt make you think. “the neo-vagina monologues” would consist of a transwoman sitting on stage, talking about how much she loves her new fuckhole, and how feminine it makes her feel. in other words, you would be stuck in a room with a bunch of slack-jawed transactivists and fun-fems for hours, which is torturous in itself. and it would be the most boring. monologue. ever (factcheckme).

For factcheckme, “the experience of a neo-vagina wouldnt engage you, wouldnt make you think” and neither would the experience of a trans woman (whose very claim to womanhood the whole passage is negating precisely through refuting the status of the neo-vagina as a vagina at all, of course). While this is by no means the tone or direct message of the *Vagina Monologues*, either before or after the addition of the trans-specific monologue, this rant still shows what is so challenging about putting trans women into the basic set up of the play: Trans women's inclusion challenges the ways in which vaginas are creating sameness among women, the ways in which womanhood is taken to be self-evident and identical with sex in the way the play has the vagina function. Many other women whose identities are currently not represented in a monologue can be integrated through addition. A monologue about menopause is currently not there, but it is no challenge to see where it would fit. Trans women produce a rift in the basic structuring trope of the play; when transgender women use that trope, the result creates difference instead of sameness.

At opening night, Adams introduces the play with its new monologue: "Women's issues are our issues, too," she says. While the play's tendency to homogenize narratives premised on vaginas on this occasion was opened up to transgender women, it indeed cannot help the ironic twist that Sandy Stone predicted. This irony manifests less in the controlled, carefully crafted vaginal coherency of the play itself than in the way the film reveals the contradictions of trans women's inclusion into a project that is centered on a trope to which they have limited or different access, if any. The play's vaginal logics are based on the ambiguous status of this trope used as both metaphor AND metonymy of womanhood and feminism. The voices in the documentary problematize their metonymical exclusion by showing that "some women have penises," but can very well speak to the experience of violence, discrimination, and anger of metaphorical vaginas as their own.

Peter Pan and Feminist Boihood

> Why is Peter Pan played by a woman? Because a woman will never grow up to be a man (Garber 168).

Unlike for Marjorie Garber, for the frequent transmasculine uses of Peter Pan and the trope of the boy, actresses play Peter Pan because women and boys might both grow up to be men.[54] Garber, here visiting yet another one of the important tropical sites of transgender rhetorics and addressing transgender not on its own terms, but only as cultural symptom, writes:

> The appearance of the transvestite in a cultural representation signals a category crisis, and in *Peter Pan* category crises are everywhere. [...] But the most obvious crisis signaled in *Peter Pan*, one so obvious as to seem banal, is that between youth and age, or time and timelessness – the boy who wouldn't grow up. So obvious and so banal is this connection that it has been the focus of a best-selling work of pop psychology, *The Peter Pan Syndrome* (Garber 182).

Garber's reading of transvestite figures as signals of category crises elsewhere is quite useful in decoding numerous popular representations and often otherwise seemingly random appearances of cross-dressing figures. However, the argument is a little bit looser in this particular example than in others Garber discusses, since Peter Pan as a literary figure is not necessarily a cross-dressing figure – he only becomes so in the performance (conventions) of the play. However, the category crisis of youth and age, time and timelessness, the story of the boy who wouldn't grow up, the boy as a figure of potential, happens on the plot level regardless of whether we are engaged with a classic cast or one with a male actor playing the role of Peter.

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[54] Gertrude Stein, who suggested that the teleology and continuity of boys growing up to be men is boring and no good for the production of masterpieces – "There is really no use being a boy if you are going to grow up to be a man because then man and boy can be certain that that is continuing" (Stein 10) – might have enjoyed the idea that there are other ways of being a boi and other starting points for men. The conditional that makes being a boy useless in her eyes comes with less certain- and continuity in the various trajectories of the boy as a transgender trope.

The frequent transgender uses of Peter take up these questions of temporality, masculinity, and potential. If they draw at all on Peter as a figure of transvestite gender category crisis, as Garber might say, they hark back to the fact that Wendy is Peter, more than to the fact that Peter is played by an actress. Peter, as Garber writes, can be read as "Wendy's ego-ideal," (Garber 167) and thus he is not just a figure of a suspended manly future, he might be read through a transgender lens as Wendy's fantasy masculine utopia. As a figure of transgender fantasies and nostalgic boyhoods that raises questions of transitioning, Peter precisely opens up the possibility that a woman *will* grow up to be a man. Singer-songwriter Simon de Voil (the subject of Travis Reeves' documentary *Funny Kinda Guy*), for instance, uses Peter Pan as the main (and title-giving) metaphor for a song about starting testosterone treatment and letting Peter Pan grow up:

> I'm Peter Pan
> and I've always been this way
> An accidental real life fairytale
> Frog that turned to Prince
> with month and year
> Peter Pan inside me, he knows
> Everything about me, he says
> 'hey it's really time you let me go'
> (de Voil)

Like Wendy, de Voil *is* Peter Pan and *has* to let him go. Garber writes that

> Transgression without guilt, pain, penalty, conflict, or cost: this is what Peter Pan – and *Peter Pan* – is all about. The boy who is really a woman; the woman who is really a boy; the child who will never grow up; the colony that is only a country of the mind (Garber 184).

For many transgender singers and poets, it seems, Peter is about the question of the cost of transgression and of growing the boy from the country of the mind into a man in the world. – Or a figure of the pain and penalty of yearning for a boyhood that seems stuck in Neverland. Spoken-word artist Kavindu Ade's poem "IT" uses Peter Pan as the "strong boy" figure representing the masculine gender expression and identification:

> You wanna be Peter Pan. You wanna be that fairy-dusted disaster that conquers Hook and slays pirates, because... that's what strong boys do. But they gave you a dress. And a name to match. And a lot of pink stuff you'd never play with. You loved action figures just as much a dolls. Yeah, you love dolls, don't lie.
>
> You don't walk like a lady though. You flunked ballet class. "You can't go, it's boys only." "Don't wear swimming trunks, wear a bathing suit. You're too old to be a tomboy, grow up." You can't fly. You never will.

Peter Pan here stands for the boy-ish, masculine coded attire and activities that get increasingly restricted and cast as gender-inappropriate ("boys only") with age ("you're too old"), leaving the poem's addressee "stuck with the body you've got and the gender you don't" (Odum). The figure of the flying boy here is utopian in the sense of articulating an aspiration as well as a site of mourning its impossibility.

Peter Pan has – explicitly or implicitly – been a recurrent presence in transgender writing about masculinity. Jacob Hale in his 1997 essay on "the genderings of U.S. leatherdyke boys and their leatherdyke daddies" explores the "uses of leatherdyke genderplay as ftm transitioning technologies" (while acknowledging that "many ftms have never participated in leatherdyke or other lesbian practices or communities at all") (Hale, "Leatherdyke Boys" 224). The figure of the boy is central to the ways in which Hale pluralizes and qualifies masculinities circulating in the specific SM communities and scenarios that he discusses. Because SM contexts are separate from work or family, because the entrance of the play party is a "spatial and discursive boundary" (Hale, "Leatherdyke Boys" 233), Hale writes, "leatherdyke boys' masculine performativities [...] are less bounded by cultural constructions of masculinity" (Hale, "Leatherdyke Boys" 225). "SM as gender technology" (Hale, "Leatherdyke Boys" 229), then, like Neverland, opens possibilities for alternative boyhoods. Hale's argument that "boy or daddy play within leatherdyke contexts can facilitate female-to-male transitioning paths" (Hale, "Leatherdyke Boys" 226) operates on a Peter Pan model of boy potential and temporality. And, indeed, as in so many uses the transgender Peter Pan tropes, the potentiality of the boyhoods explored includes both the potential future of transitioning and the imaginary boyhoods of the past:

> exploration of masculine boyhoods or periods of adolescence that were missing from our lives as we developed pubescent female bodies – bodies that were supposed to end our lives as tomboys and signal the beginnings of womanhood (Hale, "Leatherdyke Boys" 227).

Peter Pan as a figure of transgender boy identifications is often less about not becoming a man – in fact, as I've argued above, it often is precisely about becoming a man – and more about not being a woman.

Claiming (boy) masculinity, if it is a way of disclaiming womanhood, can raise feminist suspicion. Bobby Noble writes that "the figure of the boy/boi functions as a hybrid, anti-essentialist hinge point between three different kinds of resisting masculinities: lesbian boi, trans-sexual boi, and drag king bois" (Noble, *Sons* 72). While Noble understands these masculinities as "resisting," not all feminist commentators agree. For instance, Ariel Levy's chapter "From

Womyn To Bois" in *Female Chauvinist Pigs* puts the bois she encounters in lesbian bar culture in stark contrast to other feminist attempts at re-signifying gender:

> Throwing a *y* in *woman* was a linguistic attempt, however goofy, to overthrow the patriarchy, to identify the female gender as something independent, self-sustaining, and reformed. Being a boi is not about that. Boihood has nothing to do with goddesses or sisterhood or herbal tea, and everything to do with being young, hip, sex positive, a little masculine, and ready to rock. Even in an entirely female universe, there are plenty of women who want to be *like a man*. But bois want to be like a very young man. It's no coincidence that the word is 'boi' and not some version of 'man.' Men have to deal with responsibilities, wives, careers, car insurance. Bois just get to have fun and, if they're lucky, sex (Levy 121).

With her starting point of paralleling 'womyn' etymology to 'boi,' Levy appears to find boi misogyny (she casts bois as an example of the *Female Chauvinist Pigs* of her book's title) more grating than good-old-boy misogyny because she expects lesbian and queer cultural spaces to be feminist. There are a number of different ways in which one can read the distancing from 'man' that 'boi' implies, including, as we will see below, ones that highlight its feminist potential – for Levy, that distance is all about puerile misogyny and shirking responsibility, about a "sense of play, of youthful irreverence" (Levy 122). Levy interprets the bois' claims to masculinity through a lens of wanting to be "like a man" in an "entirely female universe" of lesbian cultural spaces. She discredits boi masculinity as misogynist by way of this somewhat antiquated transgender narrative, while simultaneously emphasizing that because the bois are part of a what she describes as a lesbian, "female" universe (where the nightlife settings in which Levy encounters these bois are extrapolated into an entire universe, as if the bois never left the bar, went to work, or did grocery shopping), she characterizes their masculinity as not theirs, but rather as what they *want* to be *like*. Levy devalues and caricatures FTM transgender trajectories at the same time that she uses them to read all boi masculinities. But she also dismisses those genderqueer bois who explicitly resist such a narrative of wanna-be (like) men:

> Many bois, including many FTMs, consider themselves part of a 'genderqueer' movement invested in dissolving the 'gender binary.' They don't feel that dividing the world up into men and women or, for that matter, butches and femmes is a particularly sophisticated way to conceive of gender roles. […] The confusing thing, of course, is why somebody would need serious surgery and testosterone to modify their gender if gender is supposed to be so fluid in the first place. But 'transitioning' is very popular (Levy 126f.).

Levy simultaneously uses medical transitioning as proof that genderqueer questioning of the binary and fluid gender identifications are misguided and not taking gender seriously enough – and dismisses transitioning itself as a popular fad. If some people get surgery, Levy's logic seems to say, then gender must be serious and stable. And, for Levy, this appears to mean that if gender is so serious and non-fluid, then it must be sex. In this story, FTM transitioning then proves that gender is sex and is itself impossible. And so surgery for her is a fad and transitioning is put in quotation marks. The language of fad is not just my reading of "very popular," it is Levy's explicit characterization of FTM chest surgeries when she puts together her bestiary of "female chauvinist pigs" for a final round-up:

> But despite the differences between the scene and, say, spring break in South Beach, there are also meaningful similarities in the ways young women across this country, gay and straight, are conceiving of themselves, their bodies, sex, and each other. Women are invested in being 'like a man,' and in the case of FTMs, women are actually *becoming* men. There is contempt and condescension for 'girly-girls' or 'bitches' or 'hoes,' confusingly coupled with a fixation on stereotypically feminine women (especially if they are stripping or dancing on tabletops). Elective cosmetic surgery – implants for straight women, mastectomies for FTMs – is popular to the point of being faddish. Non-committal sex is widespread, and frequently prefigured by a public ritual […] This isn't about being a lesbian, it's about being a woman, or a girl (Levy 138).

According to Levy, being a boi – even an FTM – is “about being a woman, or a girl” – and, in particular, a chauvinist woman or girl. Levy insists that not identifying as a woman or a girl is a) chauvinist and b) precisely about being a woman or a girl. There can then not be any feminist bois, because being a boi is about being a chauvinist AND about being a woman or a girl. Arguing that bois are not feminists and that their claim to masculinity – however sustained – is a faddish symptom of the larger chauvinist culture, Levy makes pretty clear that there is no place for (trans-)masculinity in feminism.

In her essay “When Girls Will Be Bois: Female Masculinity, Genderqueer Identity, and Millennial LGBTQ Culture,” literary scholar Michelle Abate sees political potential in the boi figure and boi identifications, arguing that “lesbian bois embody a distinctly queer as well as deeply postmodern take on notions about adolescent masculinity along with American conceptions of boys and boyhood” (Abate 16). She also takes a different approach to situating the emergence of the term. Unlike Levy, who, while starkly contrasting the related political and cultural contexts of their emergence, places ‘boi’ somewhere in the vicinity of ‘womyn’ as originating in a “female universe,” Abate attempts to track the appearance of the term ‘boi’ beyond its uses in lesbian communities:

> On the contrary, the first incarnation of the term ‘boy’ reimagined as ‘boi’ occurred in the realm of mainstream, even hegemonic, masculinity: via the music industry in general and hip-hop culture which often promotes a macho form of male gender expression-in particular. In the early 1990s, a young, Georgia-based musician named [Antwan Patton] adopted the performance name ‘Big Boi’ (Abate 17).

The readiness of this passage to conflate Black hip-hop culture with “meainstream, even hegemonic” masculinity is a little worrisome, especially because Abate seems reluctant to entertain the possibility that the circulation among people of color is actually one of the origins of the terms trans/queer career, not a mere coincidence or vaguely related precursor. Abate's etymological trajectory for the 'boi' goes from mainstream/hegemonic hip-hop via skater bois to LGBTQ culture. From its hip-hop appearance that she dismisses as "mainstream" and "macho," Abate writes, the term

> morphed into new socio-cultural forms – and ones that did not embody a mere homophonic respelling of the word 'boy' but signaled a new form of masculine gender expression. Young men involved in both the skate and rave scenes, for instance, adopted the moniker 'boi' (Abate 17).

She goes on to say that the term "may have first entered lesbian culture via the skateboarding scene" (Abate 19), culminating in the declaration that

> During the dawn of the new millennium, the word would detach itself from skateboarding altogether and assume a linguistic life and cultural existence all its own. In bars in cities like San Francisco and New York – as well as in the transgender and transsexual community in regions throughout the United States – it would come to signal a new queer female personal style, sexual identity, and gender performance (Abate 20).

Abate describes 'boi' as a term that first belongs to "hegemonic" hip-hop culture, then appears in masculinities that use it not as a "mere homophonic respelling" in BDSM, emo, and white skater bois,[55] *from there* is taken up by (white) lesbians and therewith becomes part of a global genderqueer phenomenon:

> Today, the term 'boi' – in reference to masculine-presenting lesbians, FTMs, gay male SM bottoms, and/or genderqueer women – can be found not only in the print, visual and cultural media of the United States, but also in that of other countries around the globe (Abate 31).

This final move toward racial and ethnic universalization of 'boi' claims universality for a term Abate's own analysis whitened by acknowledging and then declaring inconsequential its Black history. While her own analysis privileges and actively constructs a whitened development of the term, Abate recognizes the result as a problem when she notes the whiteness of her source materials:

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[55] Abate writes that in all these, "the concept remained firmly linked to a biologically male body" (Abate 18). Her chronology, especially of BDSM (gay) boihood (here placed somewhere in the 2000s, when, she asserts inexplicably, "the more sensitive usage of the concept of 'boi' among the rave, skate and emo scene caused the term to migrate to yet another community: the gay male one"), which appears to ignore the long history of gay BDSM and gender fluidity, as well as dyke and queer BDSM gender play that Jacob Hale writes about (see below), cannot be trusted.

> While Blackmore and Perry's documentary, as well as Ariel Levy's article, focuses on a subset of bois who encompass a wide range of gender and sexual identities – from lesbians and boifags to transgender individuals and FTMs – they represent a narrow range of racial and ethnic ones (Abate 29).

What Abate doesn't say here is that this "narrow range" is in part produced by her own whitening of the potential histories of the term's lesbian/queer/trans uses. Having noticed this "narrow range" as problematic, she seeks to universalize the term by going global. It should be noted that "narrow range of racial and ethnic" identities and "global" are complicated opposites. Tracking a term around the globe mostly in the footsteps of what used to be the British Empire can, but does not necessarily, produce a huge amount of racial diversity. Moreover, going global as a final step in the terms trajectory reinforces a framework in which a term goes global through and from whiteness as the great universalizer – and not from possible origins in communities of color. If this appears to be a harsh reading of the moves in Abate's construction of the usage of 'boi,' consider that a very similar intellectual move happens in her explanation of the hip hop artist Big Boi's (aka Antwan André Patton) use of the term:

> His reconfiguration of the word 'boy,' therefore, was more likely a play off the racially charged meaning that has long been associated with the term, given the long history of whites, especially in the South where Patton hailed, calling adult black men by the diminutive term 'boy.' Akin to the process of other marginali2ed groups throughout the 1990s reclaiming formerly pejorative terms-such as 'queer' in the LGBTQ community – Patton's use of the word both recalled this history and rewrote it (Abate 17).

Surely, the "reclaiming of formerly pejorative terms" has a much longer history than the 1990s – and using queer as the example of such moves, again, privileges (a whitened history of) queer as innovator over long histories of communities of color struggling with issues of language and power. We should note here that Abate somehow acknowledges the marginalization of hip-hop boi masculinities and yet still dismisses them as mainstream. We should resist these moves of rendering both brown histories and language politics inconsequential.

Drawing a single line of origin and subsequent adoptions of the term 'boi' seems problematic, especially since it is doubtful that there is a single origin or trajectory here at all. If linguistic exchanges and innovation are generally complex and hard to track, then this is particularly true for a predominately subcultural term. However, the (possible) multi-origin and (certain) simultaneity of various iterations of 'boi' is not simply an excuse for scholars to pick a single origin story and perform the kind of whitening of the term's queer circulation that Abate seems to lean toward. Instead, we must note that 'boi' has been circulating in various contexts and communities that have perhaps all "re-imagined the term 'boy' as 'boi' in the early 1990s" (Abate 17), and that the term has described a number of alternative masculinities – hip hop, skater, gay, lesbian, trans – with at times contradictory, at times intersecting and closely affiliated agendas and identifications. These multiple contexts and versions of the term have been offering each boi and each boi culture a range of ways to relate to (and as) other masculinities.

While going "global" is perhaps a stretch, even just Brooklyn is good enough for an example that problematizes Abate's story of origin and circulation – and also eerily matches Levy's tone and approach to journalistic observations at the club.[56] In fact, Chloe Hilliard's 2007 Village Voice piece "Girls to Men: Young lesbians in Brooklyn find that a thug's life gets them more women" largely reads like a lesbians of color version of Levy's article. While the term 'boi' does not appear directly in the article, the objects of Hilliard's journalistic investigation use a range of terms (in this quote mostly "AG" for 'aggressive') grouped together in moc of color organizations like the "Bklyn Boihood" as "AGs/studs/bois/doms/butches."[57] Indeed, "boys" are at the heart not just of the headline, but also of judgments throughout:

> for increasing numbers of very young black and Hispanic lesbians, the bitches-and-'hos lyrics of their musical heroes are the soundtrack for a thug's life they pursue with almost as much passion as they do the hottest femme in the club. "These AGs have a disrespectful mentality, and they get it from men, hoodlums, dudes that are in the 'hood all day," says Kysharece Young, an AG, rapper ("Ky Fresh"), and freshman at Monroe College. "They act like a bunch of little damn boys that ain't got no sense" (Hilliard).

In both Levy's and Hilliard's pieces, a small number of masculine-identified subjects are featured to criticize their masculinities as inappropriately close to dominant, misogynist ones. Of course, short-circuiting masculinity with misogyny is as unproductive here as it is in Levy's piece. On the contrary, the term boi frequently serves as a feminist banner under which bois of color come together to transform masculinity in initiatives like the "Brown Boi Project" and the "Bklyn Boihood," which describes itself as "a collective that champions healthy masculinity, intersectionality of identities and anti-misogyny for bois* of color all over the world" ("Bklyn Boihood - Meet the Collective"). What distinguishes Hilliard's piece from Levy's most prominently is the queer version of respectability politics[58] that Young, Hilliard's source in this passage, displays in the quote, in which the last thing one should act like as a masculine-identified person of color is "a little damn boy" from the "'hood." These kinds of respectability and class concerns are less present in Levy's discussion of the largely white bois in her chapter.

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[56] Levy is a source academics from Trimble (below) to Abate refer to. If for the discursive life of bois in academia, we are for the moment apparently stuck with these journalistic sources (and with Hilliard just adding another one) that can be quicker than ethnographers to keep an ear to the subcultural spaces where queer linguistic innovation happens, where we can, as Jacob Hale puts it, "familiarize ourselves and others with the multiplicity of genders already available in the curvatures of gendered spaces" (Hale, "Leatherdyke Boys" 235), we are also stuck with their journalistic methods, problematic judgments, and mainstream presentation.

[57] Bois of color are a growing activist presence. B. Cole's "Brown Boi Project" coined the term "masculine of center," which is increasingly becoming a term used beyond communities of color. The members of the "Bklyn boihood" frame their community and goal using this language: "our goal is to contribute to the creation of a healthy, safe, fun and engaging community for m.o.cs of color" (Cole; "Bklyn Boihood - Meet the Collective")

Hilliard writes about a community that draws its ideas of boihood from precisely the Black cultural framework that Abate leaves behind on the term's way to what for Abate is the political potential of boihood: "the more radical and far-reaching project of uncoupling the whole notion of boyhood from the presence or existence of biological boys" (Abate 16f.). Challenging essentialist sex-gender expectations and heteronormativity are certainly political projects, but not necessarily more radical and far-reaching than other reinventions of boyhood. It would seem that the term 'boi,' in fact, is one of the names under which various ways of problematizing the very idea of "biological boys" itself circulates – among all sorts of boys and bois. Nor are those projects Abate calls "more radical and far-reaching" unconnected from the other struggles over what masculinity means and how boys figure into it. Hilliard's piece presents us with some boys for whom the uncoupling of boyhood from ideas about bodies and sex classification happens very much in intimate connection to those hip-hop masculinities that Abate dismisses as mainstream and “biological boys.” Hip-hop boihood and lesbian/trans/queer/moc boihood are then by no means necessarily separate historical or cultural phenomena and not necessarily engaged in more or less radical politics merely based on the boi/y’s bodies and sex attribution.

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[58] In this regard, the article might be taken as an illustration of Enoch Page and Matt Richardson's argument that "Black trans subjectivity is constituted through racialized institutional practices that broadly demand from all Blacks their conformity with gendered embodiments of racially disciplined civility" (Richardson and Page 57).

Making an academic case for boi feminism, cultural theorist Sarah Trimble responds to the New York Magazine article version of Levy’s boi chapter from the perspective of someone who “began to imagine myself as tenuously located in the liminal spaces between ‘lesbian’ and ‘trans’ – indeed, between ‘butch’ and ‘boi’” (Trimble 75). Trimble can take up Levy’s piece more easily, because Levy’s article version did not yet explicitly place bois in the company of South Beach spring break straight femininities or emphasize the *female* in female chauvinism quite in the way the book would. The article alone can still be read as a critique of chauvinist bois, rather than a foreclosure of boi feminism. Indeed, it is indisputable (nor would I be at all interested in disputing) that many of the particular quotes from the bois in Levy’s article turned book chapter are anti-feminist and misogynistic. However, as the development of the piece from article to book chapter and Trimble’s interest in the question of boi feminism suggest, the chauvinism Levy seeks to denounce is actually a separate issue from boi identities as a claim to lesbian or trans masculinities. Critiquing misogynist statements, behaviors, or politics does not require that all bois must be understood as women or girls, or that being a boi is *about* being a woman or girl, that, ultimately, boi and FTM are impossible genders. Levy’s sex=gender insistence on reading all bois as women or girls makes less a point about particular misogynist behaviors than it makes clear that Levy wants feminists to be women (or girls), women (or girls) to be feminists, and, in particular, feminists to be female-bodied. Ironically, then, while criticizing them for chauvinism, Levy has no feminism to offer bois: those who might not identify as women or girls are excluded tout court and those who do would enter feminism precisely by renouncing (for Levy per definition chauvinist) boihood. Trimble, on the other hand, is interested in asking feminist questions of boihood precisely to consider a feminist politics for bois.

Levy acknowledges that "[b]eing a boi means different things to different people – it's a fluid identity, and that's the whole point" (Levy 125) without differentiating that there is quite a big a conceptual difference between fluidity (which when used in "fluid identity" is quite a paradoxical formulation) and meaning different things to different people, for whom it might mean those things in a very non-fluid way. But whether boi is fluid or polysemic and overdetermined, Levy is perfectly happy to pin down boi politics, while Trimble is less comfortable with generalizing the political possibilities of boihood, noting that Levy's "characterization arises from a small number of interviewees, almost exclusively New York-based." But rather than dismissing Levy's approach, Trimble is intrigued by the possibility to ask feminist questions of boi masculinities based on the issues Levy raises: "this 'particular camp of bois' opens up possibilities for interrogating the connections between normative, misogynistic masculinity and the conceptualization of boi subjectivities" (Trimble 76). Interrogating "the spaces which the term 'boi' opens up for self-fashioning in contemporary North America's queer communities" (Trimble 75), Trimble sees boi masculinities as both potentially oppressive and potentially subversive:

> On one hand, bois who desire to be read as masculine subjects may become implicated in the oppressive and violent refusal of fem(me)ninety; on the other, the boi's *embodied performance* is one position from which to trouble normative masculinity (Trimble 77).

Where Levy sees them as only functioning in this register, for Trimble boi claims to masculinity *may* function through drawing on oppressive or violent refusals of fem(me)ininity.[59] Unlike Levy, Trimble does not assume that masculine identification is necessarily related to misogyny. However, the difference between what Levy calls wanting to "be like a man" and what Trimble terms the desire to "be read as masculine subjects" might not be so large after all. Trimble, too, relies on a split between a masculine subject position that is wanted/desired and an *embodied performance* from which troubles normative masculinity. The bois here are subversive to the degree to which they do not embody the gender they claim. While there is a certainly a different spin on how they reject and embrace the possibilities of the boi figure, both Trimble and Levy pin feminist politics on the body – be it the body understood as assigned sex or as "embodied performance." Even in Trimble's version, then, it would appear that the boi's feminist possibilities are contingent on female embodiment, even if there is room here for desiring and performing masculinity. In fact, Trimble locates the political potential of the boi precisely in the "laying bare" of masculinity's performativity:

> In laying bare the performativity of masculinity, even while he desires to be read as such, the boi hazards unintelligibility as he becomes implicated in the project of proliferating non-essential masculinities. The anxiety that marks these negotiations *can* be mobilized to effect anti-racist and feminist boi subjectivities – a theory that must be put into practice if bois are to avoid repeating the

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[59] Trimble's merging of the words femme and femininity here signals that this "violent refusal" can emerge in reference to mainstream and queer feminine genders alike.

> oppression of fem(me)ininities that is constitutive of hegemonic masculinity (Trimble 78f.).

The language of "laying bare" here is hardly coincidental; Masculinity, shown to be unattached to an underlying sex, is revealed to be performative, through laying bare not masculinity, but the boi's body. Because for Trimble the boi, in particular, lays bare this performativity, the boi's masculinity is more performative because it is not tied to the sexed body in conventional ways. The performativity that is laid bare then is only skin deep and the resultant political possibilities emerge merely from "hazarding" a kind of unintelligibility that was unavoidable. Having tied radical politics so closely to the definitional unintelligibility of the boi's gender within the logics of binary sex and gender, Trimble, too, realizes that no political inevitability emerges and so introduces critical engagement as the necessary condition for what was supposedly inherent in the boi's embodiment: "these radical politics are inherent in the boi's definitional terms only *as potential*; they must be actively and critically engaged" (Trimble 79). It is important to counter here that without critical engagement and mobilization, radical politics are only ever inherent *as potential* – for bois, girls, or anyone else. Bois are neither inherently chauvinist, nor inherently anti-racist or feminist and Trimble's example should make us weary of linking radical politics to any embodiment or identity in a way that would allow them to bypass critical engagement and mobilization. The figure of the boy/i and its politics cannot be pinned down outside of the specific context of its mobilization. While Trimble's reminder that the boi's radical politics are only "potential" is perhaps largely a symptom of her own equivocation about identity politics and its relationship to embodiment, it does traffic in the boy/i as a figure of potentiality, which is a generative way of framing the figure's implications more broadly, particularly its temporal and utopian implications.

Tying the boy's political potential to a refusal to grow up is not limited to queer bois or feminist masculinities. Placing the boi in the larger "(North American) cultural fascination with the economies of boyhood" (Trimble 77), Trimble notes that "the postwar fascination with boys is at least partially located in their refusal of the imperatives of masculinity; the refusal to 'grow up,' as it were, is shared by the boi who is in dialogue with queer cultures" (Trimble 78). The refusal of the imperatives of manhood here is synonymous with a refusal to grow up. This refusal to grow up, coded as a negative and juvenile evasion of responsibility in Levy and as a queer political potential in Trimble, often makes the boi/y a Peter Pan figure, rather than, say, a growing, pre-man kind of boy figure.

J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan and Wendy* 1911 novel version of the story, which had appeared as a play in 1904 and whose characters, like those of *Frankenstein*, circulate in many theatrical versions and as figures of popular culture way beyond the original narrative and publishing context, opens with precisely the refusal to grow up as Peter Pan's most important – and unique – characteristic: "All children, except one, grow up! They soon know that they will grow up, and the way Wendy knew was this." Peter Pan is a figure of not growing up, but also of not living with the knowledge of having to grow up: "You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end" (Barrie and Tatar 13). Peter is not just a boy who wouldn't – and won't – grow up, he is a flying figure of fantasy, inhabiting the overlapping Neverlands of the three Darling children's minds, which Mrs. Darling, their mother, "tidies up at night" (Barrie and Tatar 18f.). For the children in the Barrie's story, access to Peter Pan and Neverland is temporally limited, a developmental stage. Wendy explains to her own daughter at the end of the novel that grown-ups can no longer fly: "Because they are no longer gay and innocent and heartless. It is only the gay and innocent and heartless who can fly" (Barrie and Tatar 182). In the story's exploration of childhood, Peter Pan symbolizes these characteristics of childhood fantasy and life worlds. But while the children in the story are acutely aware of having to grow up, for Peter, boyhood is its own state of being, not a temporal stage on the way to manhood. "I don't want ever to be a man," he said with passion. "I want always to be a little boy and to have fun" (Barrie and Tatar 42). Peter's refusal to grow up is not just about preserving gayety, innocence, heartlessness, or power of flight. It is explicitly presented as a refusal to be a man.

This refusal is central to Bobby Noble's exploration of the boy/i as a figure of feminist masculinity, and transmasculinity in particular. If speaking in the voice of a vaginal feminism produces ironic effects for trans women, the figure of the boy/i generates some paradoxical effects for trans men like Bobby Noble, who are looking to maintain a feminist voice while articulating their masculinity in terms that are largely marked by their circulation among non-trans and often non-feminist forms of masculinity:

> Each instance of masculinity is unquestioningly informed, influenced mentored, and otherwise learns to become itself from other men in their class or race. FtM tranny guys – either as trans-gendered or trans-sexual – not only have to directly 'engage' the men around them, they must also, to turn a clichéd phrase, embrace the boy within themselves in order to move closer to becoming him (Noble, *Sons* 26).

On the one hand, Noble is adamant about refusing "the privileges of becoming a man in the hegemonic ways this category is constructed. Instead, I have opted to occupy the pre-man space of boy/boi" (Noble, *Sons* 29). On the other hand, he also recognizes that the language for doing so emerges from engaging the men around him – and the clichéd language of the boy within. The "pre-man space of the boy/boi," is more than a temporal suspension of hegemonic manhood, it is a decidedly Peter Pan gesture of refusing to grow up into such manhood. In particular, Noble's celebration of the figure of the boy describes an attempt at refusing the privileges of manhood. In doing so, Noble sets his notion of the boy apart from celebrations of the boy/i as an androgynous figure: "The appeal of the boy is not necessarily a confusion of gender, but the potential for its refusal of the teleological imperatives of manhood" (Noble, *Sons* 47). The boy, for Noble, offers a way of, as he writes "'becoming male' as a lifelong process," while recognizing that "White masculinity has been, not to overstate the case, an agent of near-genocide, death, violence, terror, and destruction" (Noble, *Sons* 10). The boy is here a way of embracing an alternative, a less threatening, a less deadly, a *viable* masculinity: "In falling short – that is, in refusing to be all that a man was suppose [sic] to be – the boy brings himself into existence as a viable male subject" (Noble, *Sons* 47).

Patricia Elliot is skeptical about the appeal – both to other transmen and the "feminist/queer mother" – of Noble's vision, arguing that "some transmen may find his praise for the image of the 'boi' to better reflect his own somewhat oedipal appeal to the feminist/queer mother than their aspirations" (Elliot 66).

While Elliot perhaps accurately notes that Noble's version of the boi might not reflect everyone's aspirations (nor, to be clear, does he make that claim), it seems like the Oedipal terms of the sons in *Sons Of The Movement* are not what is problematic about Noble's use of the figure of the boy. Pulling the title's son imagery into a queer/feminist mother figure of ridicule sounds snarky, but at the same time overlooks the actual critical issue: Boyhood allows Noble to merge his claim to masculinity with a critique of White manhood from a position that is never quite within. The political intent and appeal of the figure are pretty clear, but it remains unclear what exactly it means to refuse "the privileges of becoming a man." It seems like that would require an impossible degree of control over the way masculinities get read in terms of gender, race, and age. Even in the name of the boy, it is hard to imagine subjectivity and privilege in a way that would make privilege something one can simply refuse. While it's certainly true that trans men come to manhood in different ways from cisgender men (and from each other), that is not the same as positing privilege as something that is possible to be refused outright. This is not just because, as Elliot suggests, many trans men may not want to cede their claim to manhood for various reasons, but because the idea of refusing male privilege through refusing manhood puts an agential account of subjectivity over the institutional and systematic operation of privilege. Noble's use of the boy, then, may, instead of assuming the political responsibilities of privilege and confronting the paradox of feminist manhood, evade them too easily by replacing them with a rhetoric of feminist solidarity. Based on a Neverland version of subjectivity, this feminist solidarity might not in effect mean anything more than that the boy earns laurels for joining Wendy in tidying up. In Neverland.

Moreover, the boy is surely not a figure that is per se resistant to white privilege. Peter Pan's role as the white leader of a troupe of boys fighting various racialized foes in a colonial island setting who invites Wendy (and future generations of Wendys) to visit and act as "mother," cook, and Spring cleaner would suggest that being a boy is often the staging and training ground rather than a renunciation of privilege. Theater scholar Mary Brewer reads *Peter Pan* as a reflection of "the White Imperial Imaginary" and notes succinctly how "the epistemic violence of colonial relations that reverberates throughout this popular idyll reveals some of the ideological underpinnings of the master code of whiteness in the early decades of the twentieth century" (Brewer 388). Neverland as the children's fantasy space is composed of various genre fictional elements, from the "redskins" on "the war-path" (Barrie and Tatar 57) to the vaguely racially-othered pirates. As such, Barrie's Neverland shares with these genres and their stock characters and plot devices many of their racist, colonialist, and sexist boy of adventure fantasies. Brewer argues that "[w]hile Pan may reject such elements of patriarchal masculinity as active heterosexuality, he never renounces his allegiance to the dominant racial order" (Brewer 391).[60] As Peter Pan shows, the figure of the boy is not necessarily one that refuses or resists white manhood.

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[60] Unfortunately, Brewer's article goes so far as to link Peter's resistance to "active heterosexuality" – a resistance to reproductive and familial, generational temporality that Halberstam takes to be one of the queering temporal aspects of the boy figure – to the representation of Hitler in Nazi propaganda: "The cult of the leader that characterized the Nazi creed mandated that the national Father's limited sexual relations with women be kept carefully hidden, for his power rested in part on the perception that he was wedded to his people. Just as Nazi ideology portrayed Hitler as Father of the Aryan nation, a symbol of rarefied masculine

Peter Pan is an indication that ‘boy’ is perhaps not as anti-racist interventionist as Noble would have liked. Moreover, Noble himself draws attention to ‘boy’ as a term with a history of white racial violence:

> ‘Boy’ is a term with a long history of violence within White supremacy. Not every subject will inhabit this free-floating signifier equally; while ‘boy’ might be appealing, even potentially interventionist (albeit ambivalently) for White masculinity, the term has always functioned as a tool of violence within the history of White supremacy – [...]. I am not entirely sure that the boy will necessarily have equal kinds of political currency at every moment to each materialization of masculinity (Noble, *Sons* 51).

Noble discusses the term’s differential racial echoes, but not the conceptualization of privilege and subjectivity that underlies the refusal of White manhood. It is not just that the term that will not necessarily have equal kinds of political currency, it is that the gesture of rhetorical emasculation might require a certain kind of (racial) privilege to be effective and to be effectively embraced. For bois of color, the boi is a figure of negotiating Black manhood – whatever the outcome. This version of the boi does not pose as, nor does it draw its appeal from, refusal and the strong subject that would make it possible.

In making a case for transgender feminism, J. Halberstam is perhaps as critical of boi-culture as Levy:

> By referring to the new trend for androgynous lesbians to side-step both feminism and transsexual politics in order to produce boi-culture, I suggest that the new ‘bois’ give the impression of polyvocality, fluidity and radical politics but actually they tame the exciting potential of a merger of trans and feminist politics. The new boi culture is an outcome, in many ways of a traditionally Oedipal process by which one generation supersedes the last by casting it as traditionalist and anachronistic (Halberstam, “Boys” 97).

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power, Pan is shown as immune to the temptations of female sexuality” (Brewer 391). Brewer’s insightful observations about Peter Pan’s whiteness can stand without being discredited by this bizarre move into Hitler-izing historical analogy.

Halberstam, in the accusation of side-stepping feminism and trans politics, seems to share Trimble's concern with actualizing the political potential of bois. Of course, to make such pronouncements, all three – Halberstam, Trimble, and Levy – must first fix "boi-culture" in ways that, for instance, exclude Noble's use of the term from consideration (and so, for Halberstam, only androgynous lesbians remain in this category), as well as bois of color initiatives such as the Brown Boi Project or the Bklyn Boihood.

It is interesting to note that Halberstam, like Elliot, refers to an Oedipal logic to criticize boi/y politics they disagree with – and that those two versions of the Freudian scenario, even though they each are used to criticize generationality, are very different. In Halberstam's use, Oedipal generationality means setting oneself up in opposition and in Elliot's, Oedipal means appeals by *Sons of the Movement* to feminist and queer motherly love. Because Freud's triangle is so rigidly gendered, we can go ahead and spell out the places in the triangle that make these various Oedipalizations possible: Feminism as father for bois in Halberstam (which is especially striking because the overall argument of the essay sets itself apart from stories of feminism as "generations" of mothers and daughters – Halberstam needs to queer Oedipal gender quite a bit here), feminism as mother for bois in Elliot, bois as boy children in both. Halberstam's interest is in overcoming precisely such generational logics in order to pursue a transgender feminism that thinks temporality differently. Bois, in this particular essay, cannot be part of that project.

While skeptical about the "new boi culture" in that essay, Halberstam takes a different approach to thinking about some of the queer possibilities of boyhood in the book *In a Queer Time and Place*. Here, the figure of the boy is one that carries with it potential for the transgender feminist politics at the heart of Halberstam's project. Writing about "queer time" as a term for models of temporality outside of "the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family" (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 6) with their models of progress and maturity, Halberstam here suggests that inhabiting boyhood can be "the refusal to grow up and enter the heteronormative adulthoods implied" by those models (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 179). Like Noble, Halberstam embraces the idea of boyhood as an alternative mode of inhabiting masculinity that refuses dominant modes and models of manhood. Framed in Halberstam specifically as a "refusal to grow up" into heteronormative reproduction and in Noble, however problematically, as a refusal of White male privilege, boi/yhood is used to figure alternative masculinities that distance themselves from exactly the kinds of chauvinism Levy attributes to it. This is not to say that such refusals are effective or convincing in the way they imagine their political subjects (as Noble's example shows), but it is to say that Levy's and other readings of boi/yhood as necessarily anti-feminist or misogynist do not hold. While it may be complicated and perhaps impossible to simply "refuse privilege" (precisely because of how it is attributed), it is certainly possible to articulate feminist or anti-racist political positions.

Trans women in *The Vagina Monologues* raise the question of how to enter a feminism that is grounded in a vaginal metonymy – and how to push its metaphorical potential; Peter Pan and the figure of the boy/i raise the question of the place of masculinity and its tropes in feminism.

To Halberstam, it appears "rather tired," this

> argument about whether transgender men and women can and should be feminist, whether feminists have helped or hindered transgender activism, and how feminism might build upon the utopian potential of transgender embodiment (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 179).

Instead, Halberstam is more interested in moving away from such "stale" debates to "search for new ways of articulating some of the mutual projects of a politicized transgenderism and a gender-queer feminism" (Halberstam, "Boys" 102). But articulating such projects is not enough to keep these tired arguments from welling up in relation to transmasculine and transfeminine tropes. And as long as transgender tropes and the claims to gender identifications that they carry are routinely read as subject to such stale debates, as hostile to – or at least outside the scope of – feminism, it will be difficult to find those "new ways of articulating" mutual projects and there will be little language to articulate them in.

Inhabiting rhetorical womanhood and boyhood in these tropes is not necessarily about reinforcing a sexist, binary gender system. The trans women in *Beautiful Sisters* are excited about the feminist and sexual-violence-awareness message of Ensler's play – and some do not even shy away from complicating the exclusions of pre-op trans bodies from its center. The bois of the Brown Boi project conceive of boihood as inclusive of a variety of gender identifications and articulate a feminist vision under its banner. So, on the contrary, these tropes are often about attempts at articulating feminist positions. But under the conditions of the binary system and its pressure to speak trans-identification, this is not possible without producing an account of one's place in the binary (even if it is one of genderqueer boihood). – Even if and when these rhetorical claims to gender can at times be found to take misogynist or sexist forms, that is not what sets transgender turns of such tropes apart from cisgender ways of doing gender. Whether they know this question dysphorically on a daily basis or whether their identities are inconspicuously mapped onto the ways gender is known more comfortably, everyone implicitly or explicitly answers the question: "What, given the current order of being, can I be?" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 58). The fact that trans people have to face that question in specific ways because of how that order of being is currently structured does not exclude them from taking a feminist perspective on that order. The political stakes of transgender rhetorics in feminism, then, are not just about analytically separating gender from sex, they are about disarticulating feminist subjectivity from specific sexed bodies, about a gender politics that analyzes bodies and identities as politicized, but does not, in turn, make them the ground, condition, and limit of its own politics of resistance. If and where feminism is open to feminist subjects with a range of identities and embodiments, "trans might be central, not marginal, to gender and women's studies" (Enke 2), as A. Finn Enke suggests in the introduction to *Transfeminist Perspectives*. Coming at gendered subjectivation aslant and under intensified rhetorical pressure, trans phenomena are often treated merely as an object of feminist analysis, critique, or boundary work. Instead of understanding trans identifications as anti-feminist symbols of the ways in which gender is enacted, feminism should consider trans rhetorics central to (and, conversely, in need of) feminist analyses of the gendered subjectivation – including through some forms of feminism – of all subjects, from Eve Ensler to feminist bois.

Coda: Gender Metaphoria

Dysphoria from Greek δυσ-, difficult, and φέρειν, to bear.

Metaphor from Greek μετά (meta), between, and φέρειν, to bear, to carry.

This project started with the thesis that the mirrors, monsters, and metaphors of transgender rhetorics tell us something about dysphoric knowledge. The monster shows how dysphoric knowledge characterizes the affective experience of knowing the place of one's embodiment in the gendered order of the world. Mirror scenes reveal dysphoric knowledge to be produced at the rhetorical impasse of having to fit transgender experience into mirror models of knowledge and gender. Ghosts appear where pronominal and temporal incoherence haunts narratives of gender dysphoria. Skin and clothes are surfaces on which claims to gender are grounded and contested, while the figure of Peter Pan and the *Vagina Monologues* bring to the fore some of the feminist contentions about transgender claims to gender. Having pinned various chapter tails on the donkey named "something," I want to conclude by making the link between transgender rhetorics and dysphoric knowledge in two ways:

On the one hand, these tropes are how gender dysphoria as an experience of gendered embodiment in the world – "This is what makes me feel most dejected: that I will forever be conscious of my body in a way that others fully take for granted" (Rubin, "Reading" 319) – becomes the stuff of language. On the other hand, gender dysphoria is also a matter of linguistic affect, produced by the pressure to claim gender rhetorically – to verbalize what was supposed to be 'literal,' commonsensical knowledge of one's place in the gendered order of things

– using precisely the kind of language that will always produce, to borrow Riley's language, "the feeling of inauthenticity under certain linguistic circumstances" (Riley, *Selves* 57). Riley's essay on "why the requirement to be a something-or-other should be so hard to satisfy in a manner which is convincing to its subject" (Riley, *Selves* 1) explains that "any act of identification is systematically askew, since I'm envisaging what I presume that I'm supposed, in the eyes of others, to really be" (Riley, *Selves* 13). Transgender claims to gender are, according to this logic, "askew" in intensified ways and have to confront this askewness at an intensified rate, because they are called into acts of identification much more frequently, in fact, their gender identity is the result of such an act of identification, rather than a tacit adoption of a gender identity that the eyes of others had already assigned before they themselves entered into language as speakers.

The line from Aaron Raz Link's memoir, "Every word I've used to name myself has sometimes been a lie. Every experience I thought was unique, I've heard from someone else's mouth" (Link and Raz 196), thus makes perfect sense in the context of Riley's analysis of the linguistic affect of self-description and self-naming into categories such as gender: "If I say 'I am an x' – or deny it – then I'm confident only that now I am something of a liar" (Riley, *Selves* 57). Self-description comes with "feelings of fraud" (Riley, *Selves* 60), because its language is not referential, nor is it completely controlled by the agency of the rhetor-subject, it is part of a larger discursive frame, in which it is always already someone else's: "your word is already not 'half' but is wholly 'someone else's' – is already everyone else's – and can only be copied, or stolen back again" (Riley, *Selves* 63). That's precisely what Link notices in his explanation of why every word he has used to name himself has sometimes been a lie. Trans people cannot but claim gender rhetorically, at least initially, at least some of the time, and always at the very least with more frequency and higher stakes than cisgender people. Their access to gendered bathrooms, trans-specific healthcare, forms of address, forms of legal ID depends on such rhetorical claims to gender and these daily-life situations force frequent reiterations of such claims – often, and crucially, in the form of corrections, of claiming gender against sex-based attribution, its institutional power, and informational afterlife. But direct claims of identification a) do not conform to the ways gender is supposed to be known, the ways in which valid knowledge claims are made and b) linguistically produce "feelings of fraud" in the speakers. Simply stating that one *is* a certain gender, then, fails transgender rhetorics on all levels. Instead, metaphor steps in to carry the gender claims and experiences that referential language, mirror models of sex and gender, and metonymical connections between bodies and gendered meaning find too difficult to bear. Dysphoric knowledge allows us to take seriously the kinds of negative affect that emerge at various points of experiential and embodied nonfit – and thus cannot be reduced to linguistic affect alone. But linguistic affect suggests that we can only understand the particular forms transgender rhetorics take, when we consider that while many trans people experience gender dysphoria, the sexual binary (as the authoritative way of organizing what can be known and said about gender-sex-sexuality) has gender metaphoria.

The particular incitement to speak gender itself generates a dysphoric rhetorical position similar to that which Rubin bemoans in being conscious of his body. Transgender memoirist Jennifer Finney Boylan writes:

> The more we feel compelled to keep explaining ourselves, the less like others we become. As Zero said to me, rather late in transition, 'Listen, Jenny, I don't mind you being a woman. But don't you think you could shut up about it once in a while?' (Boylan, *Not There* 250)

Boylan has yet to shut up about it, because the compulsion she feels is generated by the ways in which her gender fails to fit propositional models of sexed knowledge and gender attribution. And while her efforts to explain herself generate gendered recognition in the world and allow her to claim her gender, they simultaneously highlight her different position vis-à-vis gender, make her "less like others" and produce gender dysphoria as a linguistic affect.

Riley argues that self-identificatory language is not a matter of truth, but of subjectification:

> Taking on some rendering of myself through the diction of emancipatory identifications is not some venerable matter of how I tell my truth through introspection but instead of how I can properly come to inhabit a categorical truth which precedes me – in short, of how I become a subject (Riley, *Selves* 34).

This does not mean, however, that avoiding such identification is possible or more truthful: "neither an 'identity' nor a nonidentity can ever quite convince" (Riley, *Selves* 89). In fact, if non-transgender people face a less intensified pressure to claim gender rhetorically, but rather produce it implicitly and are expected to conform with sensuously known attributions, then they do so not because they manage to evade such subjectification, but because they already more properly inhabit the reigning categorical truths of gender without acts of "telling."

The study of transgender rhetorics and dysphoric knowledge then does not tell us any fixed, underlying, literal (as if that were any less rhetorical) “truth” about (trans-)gender, but it helps us understand the epistemological value of the experientially truthful sometime lies of (trans)gender and self-narration in the 20th and early 21st century.

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