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THINKING AND FEELING WITH “TRANS AFFECT”

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

with an emphasis in FEMINIST STUDIES

by

Harlan E. Weaver

June 2012

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Abstract

This dissertation articulates the ways that thinking and feeling with “trans affect” promises better understandings of experiences of trans embodiment. First examining key intellectual debates in feminist, queer, and trans theories about the inheritances and formations of “transgender” and trans, the dissertation explores ties between these conversations and discussions in feminist science studies about knowledge politics. Arguing that attention to “affect,” or feeling as bodily movement and emotion, promises better ways to get at the lived experiences of trans people, the dissertation focuses on the role of specifically “trans affect” as a means to understand the kinds of transformations and emergent knowledges that trans experiences promise. Close readings of the role of “trans affect” in work by Aleshia Brevard, Leslie Feinberg, and Susan Stryker reveal the ways that “trans affect” can prompt transformations in not just methods of reading and understanding, but also in the knower who seeks its touch. The writing concludes by articulating how the mode of attention that inheres in “thinking and feeling with trans affect” can and should be brought into other projects in ontology and epistemology.

Dedication

To my parents, for their constant support and affection. To my advisors, Donna Haraway, Carla Freccero, Karen Barad, and Nancy Chen, whose skills as readers and thinkers are quite possibly exceeded by their work as mentors. And to Haley, Lukifer, Annie, and Tucker, my constant companions who keep teaching me new ways of understanding the world.

Introduction

An intellectual genealogy of “thinking and feeling with ‘trans affect’”

It’s more like an erosion than a decision. – Jennifer Finney Boylan on her transition

A lot of voices tell us to think nondualistically, and even what to think in that fashion. Fewer are able to transmit how to go about it, the cognitive and even affective habits and practices involved, which are less than amenable to being couched in prescriptive terms.
– Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

This dissertation asks two fundamentally interwoven questions: How do thinking and feeling *with* transgender and transsexual authors produce better understandings of their experiences? And how does thinking with feeling, or with “affect” as I will define it in the course of this introduction, change knowledge production for the better? This introduction details the intellectual trajectory that led to these questions, outlining the conversations that prompted me to think with feeling in and through transgender experiences of embodiment. Following Sedgwick’s interest in the practices and habits that make up the *doing* of thinking nondualistically, I begin by taking up the problem of binarisms.

Two by Two

A dualism key to feminist theories of embodiment is that of the division between mind and body. Elizabeth Grosz, among others, highlights this when arguing that “the body has thus far remained colonized through the discursive practices of the natural sciences,” all of which assert its naturalness and its “fundamentally biological and

precultural status” (x). Ludmilla Jordanova underscores Grosz’s point in noting that the assumption of sex difference inherent in the division of female and male maps onto other prominent divides such as nature/culture and body/mind, yielding female/body/nature: male/culture/mind (55-74). That these divisions are assumed and that they are implicitly paired with sexual difference reveals how the ways of understanding common to modern Western cultures often rely on divisions that efface the realities of how people actually experience their bodies. Taking issue with the coding of bodies as feminine and passive, Grosz argues that “bodies ... function interactively and productively ... they act and react,” generating “what is new, surprising, and unpredictable” (xi). Grosz’s point, that all bodies are experienced as corporeal, and that bodies cannot be read as passively following the instructions of a distant and distinct mind, challenges the dualism of mind/body. Indeed, anyone who has ever experienced the unwelcome feeling of nausea, for example, knows that bodies are certainly capable of generating unexpected sensations and understandings. This line of thinking is helpful in pointing out the ways that the dualism of mind/body, like a number of other dualistic understandings, “gets it wrong.” However, the kind of thinking outside dualisms Sedgwick desires also speaks to other currents in contemporary feminist and postmodern thought of special relevance to transgender embodiments.

Jay Prosser, writing on transsexual narratives of embodiment in *Second Skins*, laments how readings oriented around questions of hegemony, subversion, and gender obfuscate good understandings of transsexual lives. Implicitly referring to debates such as those about the film *Paris is Burning* (see next chapter) that ask whether and how drag

performances reify or subvert gender norms, Prosser confronts what he terms “fear of the literal.” Arguing that in so much contemporary theory “‘fear of the literal’ (what we might term referential panic: the enormous pressure to disown, to abrogate the referent) encodes all literalizing as hegemonic (‘bad’) and all deliteralizing as subversive (‘good’),” Prosser finds that “the binary of textual effect (subversive/hegemonic) is calcified onto the binary of the subject’s relations to referentiality (literalizing/ deliteralizing)” (15). For Prosser, when deployed in relation to transsexual subjects, this move is especially problematic: “in readings that embrace the transsexual as deliteralizing, as much as those that condemn the transsexual as literalizing, the referential transsexual subject can frighteningly disappear in his/her very invocation” (14). As the writings to which Prosser refers explicitly question binarized gender through transsexual figures, his argument regarding literal/nonliteral reveals how new binarisms can emerge in work that directly contests dualisms, effacing lives lived and bodies themselves in the process.¹

Of course, there are many more dualisms to add to those named by Grosz, Jordanova, and Prosser, and in addition to mind/body, hegemonic/subversive, male/female, active/passive, and literal/figurative, one can add inner/outer, material/discursive, sex/gender,² and homo/hetero to an increasingly lengthy list of problematic binaries. These binaries come from both queer theories and transgender studies, for both fields contribute to problematic frameworks that interfere with the realization of good understandings of transgender embodiment. For example, the

¹ Gayle Salamon’s *Assuming a Body* pursues a similar strategy to that of Prosser, pointing to the manner in which “sexuality is a matter not of seeing but of *sensing*, which takes

² Sex/gender is not a binary opposition in the same way as the others listed, but I place it in this list because it inherits the nature/culture distinction (as noted by Jordanova).

distinction of inner/outer is a common way to describe the experience of gender dysphoria. Many narratives of transition repeatedly emphasize experiencing a sense of being a “woman trapped in a man’s body” or feeling simply “trapped in the wrong body.” This language gives a sense of there being an inner core at odds with the external body. And yet, the prominence of this description is often attributed to medical gatekeeping (see the section on Sandy Stone’s “The Empire Strikes Back” in my second chapter), such that it is difficult if not impossible to discern whether this phrase is a rote invocation deployed for the purpose of gaining treatment or if it actually speaks to how a particular transperson understands his/her/hir body.³ In a similar vein, gender transitions challenge the distinction of heterosexual versus homosexual, for if a person partners with women as a man, transitions, and continues to partner with women, does she suddenly become gay even though her desires have not changed?

Questions of language in transgender communities further underscore the difficulties inherent in the binarisms of material/discursive and sex/gender. Because correct pronoun usage in transgender circles is a matter of considerable importance, the use of a person’s chosen pronoun (rather than one assumed to apply on the basis of bodily or vocal characteristics) highlights how language’s intersection with bodies is an active negotiation rather than a passively produced legibility. Practices such as the act of referring to a transman at the beginning of his transition as “he” (regardless of the means he chooses to complete his transition, or when he decides he has finished transitioning),

³ Throughout this dissertation I use the neologisms ze (singular) and hir (possessive, object), in somewhat common use in U.S. trans communities, in order to refer to individuals who identify as neither male nor female.

for instance, change the meaning of his body, revealing how transgender embodiments exemplify how materiality affects discourse and discourse affects materiality. Indeed, this type of interaction echoes assertions such as Donna Haraway's that "discourses are not just 'words'; they are material-semiotic practices through which objects of attention and knowing subjects are both constituted" (*Modest Witness* 218). Similarly, self-descriptions such as transsexual author Aleshia Brevard's deliberate invocation of "gender transition" rather than sexual reassignment surgery ("Interview with Mary Weaver" 64), or the use of words traditionally assigned to different anatomy (as in the case of a transwoman who has not undergone genital surgery and who speaks about having a "large clit"), confuse and change the ways that sex and gender intersect in terms of embodiment. Sex cannot be taken to refer to the strictly biological and gender to cultural manifestations when the biological is articulated and re-articulated only through cultural categories and vice versa. In these ways, the transgender bodily experiences both confuse and challenge numerous binarisms. And yet, what of Sedgwick's question?

The above list of binarisms highlights the conversations to which this dissertation hopes to contribute. This list also connects to the epistemic project of this thesis; as Prosser's argument reveals, readings focused on a binarized sense of hegemonic/subversive efface the lived experiences of trans people, such that the problems of binarisms are interwoven with issues of articulating good or better understandings of trans experiences. In this sense, I share with Sedgwick the goal of developing "cognitive and affective habits" that elude binarisms, because such habits also promise better understandings of the lives of trans subjects. At the same time, I am

wary of the focus on trans and transgender subjects themselves as figures poised to enter the latest round of rights-based discourses, pursuing social equity through a model of citizenship itself rooted in a troubled inheritance, given the origins of the language of rights. More specifically, another intellectual conversation key to this writing has been one centered in challenging the figure of the singular, sovereign subject.

On Subjects

A concept does not simply die when one wants it to, but only when new functions in new fields discharge it. – Gilles Deleuze

While many of the trans-authored texts I write with in this dissertation, the memoirs in particular, tell stories of biographical individuals, my reading is not centered on a normative, individualistic subject. Indeed, there is a rich archive of work that critiques both the subject as an individual and the Subject, place-holder for a universal “I.”⁴ My interest in these critiques lies in the kinds of mappings they produce, for they detail a material-semiotic framework that lends itself to the type of understanding I hope to achieve in my own writing.

⁴ It is also notable that there is a lack of agreement as to what such a figure, prior to its deconstruction, even is; for instance, Derrida notes that this “character” could not be “the same for Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan, Foucault, Althusser, and others,” revealing a lack of coherence in its conceptualization even prior to efforts towards its undoing (98 “Eating Well”). This lack of agreement can also be read as the manner in which those who have pursued the subject’s deconstruction produced it as a (fictitious) unity through assertions of its existence as either Subject or subject. Indeed, Spivak argues in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* that “the much-publicized critique of the sovereign subject ... actually inaugurated a Subject” (248).

One cluster of subject-centered writings I have identified is shaped, if sometimes loosely, by the conceptual work of Louis Althusser. Drawing from Althusser's argument that individual subjects are constituted through their being hailed into ideology, Teresa de Lauretis reads gender as an ideology, arguing, "gender has the function (which defines it) of constituting concrete individuals as men and women" ("Technology of Gender" 6). Similarly, Michel Foucault states in *Society Must Be Defended* that, in looking to "a theory of domination, of dominations, ... rather than starting with the subject (or even subjects) and elements that exist prior to the relationship, ... we begin with the power relationship itself," such that we address "how actual relations of subjugation manufacture subjects" (45). These accounts reveal the subject as a figure born of relations of domination, subject to and constituted by larger forces. However, other readings emphasize the effacements that necessarily accompany such subject constitution.

Erasure, abjection, and foreclosure are prominent topics in feminist and postcolonial discussions about subject constitution. In "Of Bugs and Women," Rosi Braidotti quotes Luce Irigaray, who notes that "we can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the 'masculine,'" for "subjectivity denied to women" has long grounded the constitution of objects "of representation, of discourse, of desire" (Irigaray *Speculum* 133; qtd. in Braidotti 121). In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler argues, "the subject ... is formed by virtue of ... assuming a sex," a process which, in its linkage with identification, "enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other(s)," making subject-construction an "exclusionary matrix." In her reading, the process of subject formation thus "requires the simultaneous

production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet ‘subjects,’ but who form the constitutive outside of the domain of the subject” (3). Similarly, reading the project of imperialism as the violent production of “the episteme that will ‘mean’ (for others) and ‘know’ (for the self) the colonial subject as history’s nearly-served other,” Gayatri Spivak articulates another understanding of subject crafting, wherein which epistemic violence produces an othered, if not abject, subject (215).

While Braidotti, Butler, and Spivak all have distinct conceptions of subject production, they rely on a similar structural narrative that locates others and otherness as a necessary outside or erasure that happens through the production of subjects. In contrast with Althusser, de Lauretis, and Foucault, whose writings envision subject-production as a node through which force relations exert an almost unilateral crafting, these authors emphasize effacement, foreclosure, and exclusion, tropes that make of subject constitution a process in which the subject occupies a privileged space in a landscape structured through an exteriorized and forcibly absent otherness. Importantly, all of these authors’ renderings rely on a structured division between external and internal. On the one hand, there is the subject formed by and crafted through relations of domination that stem from an implicitly external world, while on the other we see a formation whose very creation creates an outside through continual epistemic violence. Neither of these conceptualizations can be called hopeful, and their reliance on a similar metaphorical topography echoes binaries in its structure of either/or, in or out, that makes it hard to see to the side, or around, or, well, differently. In short, what these critiques reveal is the need to rework the ways we conceive of the relationship between

the self and the world, so that we might come to think apart or aside from this focus on the intersection of larger and smaller logics of domination which, in turn, produces and escalates a tension between inner and outer. What these readings reveal is the need for a new focus that might prompt a different mode of attention, one I would like to suggest can be found in “affect.”

On Affect

The affect is not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel.

– Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari

Scholarly writings on affect have deeply influenced my reading of bodily emotions and transgender embodiments. But what is affect? Patricia Clough describes how affect “refers generally to bodily capacities to affect and be affected or the augmentation or diminution of a body’s capacity to act, to engage, and to connect” (2). And as Deleuze and Guattari note, affect resists individuation, for it travels in ways that usurp conventional notions of subjectivity by failing to inhere in any one individual, abject or no. In his translator’s notes to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi emphasizes this tendency in his definition of affect as “an ability to affect or be affected [;] it is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act” (xvi). In this account, affect precedes individuation and travels through movements of bodies; it is to move and be moved, prompting even ephemeral shifts in embodiment.

For Rei Terada, feeling, emotion in particular and not just affect, “already contraindicates the idea of the subject,” (7) indeed, “emotion is the sign of the absence of” the illusion of subjectivity (157). Similarly, Adam Frank and Eve Sedgwick find in Sylvan Tomkin’s writings on affect a remarkable resistance to the development of a consolidated core self (99). Joining these writings is not some topographical avoidance of the subject through naming affect as primary, thereby dissipating the subject into the periphery, but rather a strong intimation that affect changes and refigures the singular, coherent subject. Nowhere is this shift more evident than in the question of will.

For Lawrence Grossberg, affect as a “prepersonal intensity” derives, in part, from its ability to usurp volition: “it circumscribes the entire set of relations that are referred to with such terms as ‘volition,’ ‘will,’ ‘investment,’ ‘commitment,’ and ‘passion’” (82). Terada argues that “passion drives intentional subjectivity to its self-undoing” (5). In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed echoes the disarticulation of individual will, noting, “the ‘doing’ of emotions is not reducible to individual actions (though it involves action) and is not governed by the logic of the reproduction of the human” (18). Indeed, for Ahmed, “emotions are not ‘in’ either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated” (10). In Ahmed’s reading, emotions move in an economy, and while their movement is independent, the boundaries they produce shape the divide between self and other.

The surfacing that Ahmed locates in emotions is further reflected by affect’s tendency to lend texture to experience. Ahmed often describes feelings as sticky and/or slippery (8). Sedgwick, citing Renu Bora’s “Outing Texture,” remarks, “a particular

intimacy seems to subsist between textures and emotions” (17). Grossberg notes that “affect operates across all of our senses and experiences, across all of the domains of effects which construct daily life,” that “affect is what gives ‘color,’ ‘tone,’ or ‘texture’ to the lived” (81). Suspending for the moment the distinction between affect, emotion, feeling, and passion, one might look to affect’s textures (visual, aural, haptic) as a means to describe its suffusing of experience, its inextricability from descriptions of being and acting. Even so bland a description as “thinking calmly,” or the heavier “cold calculation,” is laden with texture, such that thought, and the description of experience it often encompasses, is coupled with a sensual register in which some mode of perception (coldness, the stasis and serenity of calmness) textures its rendering. Affect shapes and forms experience in that it is impossible to describe acts of doing and thinking without texturing them with feeling.⁵

Affect diverges from emotion and passion, and to some extent, feeling, in its presentation as both bodily and social. William James’s oft-cited sentence, “we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble,” reveals how bodily movements and emotional states are inextricable, for our movements determine our emotions (*Principles of Psychology* 1066). However, the order James highlights, in which emotions follow from rather than precede bodily movements, points to the way that affect shapes bodies and experiences. By moving bodies, affect shapes and suffuses the space between self and other, affecting in turn the encounters that mark self and other as separate and bounded. This shaping of space and bodies makes affect distinct from

⁵ In addition to the authors noted here, Denise Riley’s “Malediction” (*Impersonal Passion*, 9-28) also speaks to affect’s texture in language.

emotion and passion, for while both inhere in either self or other, they do not suffuse the spaces between self and other in the manner that affect does.⁶

In my understanding, feeling and affect are fairly companionable, for I take affect to be first and foremost a bodily intensity. Rather than follow authors that locate affect in a more cognitive model –Aristotle, Sartre, and followers—I write in kinship with Descartes, Hume, and James (as well as Massumi, Grossberg, and, to some degree, Ahmed). I use the term affect to describe a sensual, bodily experience, one whose hapticity resonates with the term feeling as a bodily movement and emotional state. The experience of that intensity often begins with an external prompt; as James indicates, our fear, sorrow, and anger stem from encounters that touch us and move us and impel us to touch (or strike) and move (or run or tremble), movements that determine where “I” begin and another ends. These moments make and re-make the divide between self and other, shaping what it means to share space, a variation of being social. This sense of the social is the one aspect of affect that I read as distinct from feeling. While shared feelings make up elements of social experiences at, say, a memorial service (grief, sadness, and anger), the way feelings tend to be expressed is individualistic, as in the common tactic recommended by counselors of using “I” statements based in the speaker’s own feelings. The same cannot be said of affect, for the bodily movements of affect can inhere in one body and in many bodies, and to speak of them as movements or more clearly articulated emotions is easy to do with both groups and individuals. Thus, while I find

⁶ See also Teresa Brennan *The Transmission of Affect* 24-50.

feeling and affect to be quite similar in their attention to bodily movements, affect more usefully describes both the social and the personal.

Taking Ahmed, Terada, James, Massumi, and Grossberg together, I understand affect as a force that suffuses and shapes the movements that make and remake subject and object, knower and other. Affect produces boundaries, but it also travels in and through the encounters that engender those surfaces, and is thus both bodily and social. The surfaces and boundaries of who we become can be sticky, smooth, slick, hard, and soft, making us more and/or less able to touch and be touched by disparate encounters in other moments. Affect's movements are often involuntary, and thus the boundaries it inscribes can happen in spite of our intentions, as we are remade through each encounter. In this sense, while one might read affect as participating in the production of binaries through its work in producing boundaries such as self/other, it challenges those binaries by demonstrating how they constantly shift rather than remain static. In addition, the kinds of movement without or in spite of volition affect inspires reveals how it can drive change, not just in bodies, but also in discourses and understandings, for affect can make and remake who we understand ourselves to be in spite of our most determined intentions.

Trans, Transgender, and Transsexual

I will write of a transgender community or of transgender-identified men and women, because this describes a social reality; while at the same time I am investigating how it has even become possible to call a community or a person 'transgender.'

– David Valentine

Throughout this dissertation, I use, with as much local specificity as possible, the terms transgender and transsexual. I also use the more recent neologisms of “transman,” “transwoman,” “transpeople,” and “trans.” These terms are generally understood by the persons to whom they refer as the identity categories with which they align themselves. And yet these terms are troubled by the issues that plague most categories, for they seek to group under a particular rubric a broad array of people who may or may not fit themselves into those categories and/or whose lived experiences may trouble any easily understood category boundaries. Take, for instance, “transgender,” which Valentine so eloquently critiques.

One cannot take up “transgender” as a category without first observing its relationship to transsexual. In *Transgender History*, Susan Stryker describes transsexual as a term that “typically refers to people who feel a strong desire to change their sexual morphology in order to live entirely as permanent, full-time members of the gender other than the one they were assigned at birth” (18). Common usage of transgender varies, for it can be used to refer to “those who identify with a gender other than the one they were assigned at birth,” making it akin to transsexual (but not necessarily implying medical intervention), and it can be used more broadly to “refer to the widest imaginable range of gender-variant practices and identities” (19). This latter approach takes transgender as an “umbrella term” and has been the subject of much critical attention, for the “umbrella” can efface differences within the category as well as modes of being

that blur its boundaries. Indeed, the decision to title one of the seminal texts in the field highlights these problems.

In “(De)Subjugated Knowledges,” her introduction to the *Transgender Studies Reader*, Stryker acknowledges the complicated problem of the category transgender. Pointing to “the struggles that have attended the advent of ‘transgender’ as a descriptive term for a heterogeneous class of phenomena,” Stryker notes, “merely to use the word is to take up a polemical and politicized position” (2). And yet, the reader is located in transgender studies, a move Stryker describes in utilitarian terms, describing how she and her co-editor, Stephen Whittle “took the easy way out and pragmatically acknowledged that the term ‘transgender,’ for all its limitations and masked agendas, was the term in most common usage that best fit what we were trying to talk about” (3). And these limits are myriad, as when some transgender groups claim transsexual identities as part of the “transgender umbrella,” a move that some activists, such as Jamison Greene, find problematic.⁷ Transgender deployed this way also elides the multiple ways people understand themselves as transgender, for it places in the same categorical space a person who identifies as in-between or non-gendered and someone who has transitioned to fully male and/or female, neither of whom may feel they fit in the same category as the other. Temporality is also a concern, for someone who self-describes as a “woman of transgender experience” –that is, a woman in the present who sees herself as formerly transgendered – can still be named “transgender” through Stryker and Whittle’s use of

⁷ Greene (meeting 7/09) and Dean Kotula (*Phallus Palace*), along with Jay Prosser (see Chapter Four), are all insistent on maintaining clear distinctions between transgender and transsexual.

the term. Of course, Stryker and Whittle recognize the ways that categories as a whole are, as Gayle Rubin notes, “imperfect, historical, temporary, and arbitrary,” for “we use them to construct meaningful lives, and they mold us into historically specific forms of personhood” (479). But, in order to be intelligible, to make sense to others who traffic in the same language and many of the same concerns (the relationship of sex to gender to sexuality, for example), these authors use the category transgender even as they are fully aware of its imperfections. I would like to propose a similar move in my use of a related term, “trans,” in this dissertation.

Stephen Whittle notes that trans as a stand-alone term is relatively new. Writing, “it did not come into formal usage until it was coined by a parliamentary discussion group in London in 1998,” Whittle roots this use in its “deliberate intention of being as inclusive as possible when negotiating equality legislation” (xi). Valentine also nods to “trans”; he describes how “since the end of my fieldwork, the prefix ‘trans’ has come to stand by itself in many contexts, partly to avoid precisely the categorical issues that arise in using ‘transgender’” (fn. 19, 161). If we follow Whittle, the use of “trans” and its cousins, “transwomen,” “transmen,” “trans people,” and even “trans rights,” stems from a political stance oriented, by necessity, towards a world not aware of the specific issues facing transgender, transsexual, and/or trans people.

However, as Valentine notes, trans also refuses the distinctions of transsexual versus transgender, and it is this refusal that interests me. Trans as a stand-alone signifier attaches to neither –gender or –sexual (or –ssexual), deftly refusing both (and their concomitant stakes in sex versus gender and nature versus culture) in what I see as a

hopeful abbreviation. And so I take up the term trans in this dissertation's central formulation, "trans affect," because of its utility in thinking apart from these key binarisms. In this sense, trans as I use it bridges the need to be understood perhaps especially by the community this discussion is about—trans is intelligible regardless of one's stakes in the distinctions of transsexual/transgender, sex/gender, and nature/culture—and the project Sedgwick suggests of "cognitive and affective habits" that avoid binarisms. Having defined two key terms of this project's title, I now conclude this introduction by addressing the role of "thinking and feeling with."

Intimate Knowledges

The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. – Donna Haraway

A speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it. A speaking in brief, whose closures are only moments of transition opening up to other possible moments of transition. – Trinh T. Minh-Ha on "speaking nearby"

The formulation "thinking and feeling with" is key to this writing's attempt to produce good understandings of transgender experiences of embodiment, or "trans embodiment." As a mode of doing, a cognitive and affective habit, "thinking and feeling with" maps out a concern central to conversations about knowledge production when the knowledge produced is about an other, even on an other's behalf. Thus one of the central questions my formulation of "thinking and feeling with" addresses is precisely the

problem to which Haraway and Trinh allude, that of not wanting to speak for or over another.

Questions of speaking for loom large in feminist debates in general and in feminist and queer theory debates about trans subjects in particular. We can see this not only in Prosser's concern that celebratory readings of subversion in transgender embodiments ignore the lived lives of those subjects, but also in work such as Jacob Hale's writing on "Brandon Teena," a transgender figure whose murder mobilized an incipient transgender movement, but whose self-identification was effaced by competing claims over what category to place him in (see chapter one). Many a forum I have attended featuring transgender speakers stressed this subject, and remarks positing a need for more transgender authors to write about transgender experiences are ubiquitous in both these meeting spaces and online forums, such as trans-specific listservs. These positions echo a significant debate in feminist science studies on the question of standpoints in knowledge production.

A distinct trend in feminist critical theory in the 1970s and 1980s, feminist standpoint theory articulates a changing relationship to processes of knowledge production and questions of objectivity. Arguing against the presumed lack of perspective commonly attributed to objective scientific production, feminist standpoint theorists like Sandra Harding posit that better knowledge can be had by writing and thinking from an explicit perspective, or more precisely, from an explicitly feminist perspective. Pointing to scientific work with vested interests in displacing, for example, the implicitly androcentric norms of medical research, Harding and others challenge

conventional notions of objectivity by arguing that science itself is a cultural practice. The standpoint element of the critique comes from the argument that knowledge is produced from particular places, situated in cultures and histories rather than coming from a transcendent nowhere. Further, standpoint theories are also loosely connected to the English aphorism of “taking a stand”; as Harding puts it, “a standpoint is an achievement, not an ascription” (*Sciences from Below* 120). In this sense, being a woman does not automatically mean that one has access to a feminist standpoint. Rather, the process of coming to read social and cultural norms through feminist inquiry, in which one takes to task apparently natural institutional norms, for example, is central to the larger achievement of a feminist standpoint. Taking a standpoint means connecting structural inequities with the ways one understands how, for example, science acts as a cultural practice, paying particular attention to the locations on the peripheries of dominant social groups that are shaped (and even dislocated) by particular scientific cultural practices.

In terms of feminist standpoint theories, my writing from the perspective of a white trans man, or perhaps more aptly, the position of a person who was formerly female and is now trans, does not translate directly into some kind of singular trans standpoint. While this dissertation certainly shares at least some perspectives on being transgender or trans, when one takes into account the variation among experiences of trans, transgender, and transsexual in light of not merely the distinctions specific to those categories but also their intersections with race, class, age, nation, it becomes clear that a

shared position on the periphery does not necessarily mean that one shares all such positions.

I position this writing through a perspective that is semi-shared, or partially shared with other trans people, one that comes out of an achieved awareness of how specific differences shape disparate experiences of being or becoming trans. While this positioning does not fully address the thorny problems of speaking for or language that seizes that Trinh so eloquently describes, it does help me work towards a closely related question, that of intimacy in the production of shared knowledge. The proximity of semi-shared or partially shared perspectives highlights the question of positioning in this knowledge production. On the one hand, there is the structural position so important to standpoint theories that speaks to larger social dynamics of often intersecting oppressions, and on the other, there is the sense of position quite different in scale, one denoted by Haraway's more singular description of seeking to "see together without claiming to be another" (193). My use of "with" addresses this issue.

Rather than writing about or on another, what I hope to communicate through "with" is a sense of intimacy, of proximity, of being near the others with whom I write. Witness the metaphors employed by Haraway in her pointing to the need to "join with," to "see together" with an other; mark Trinh's emphasis on the preposition nearby as a means to use language close to that of an other without claiming his/her/hir voice. My use of "thinking and feeling with" takes up this epistemological project of coming close, of not letting the gap between self and other loom quite so large, of coming near to an other without wanting or needing to claim the same space (or perspective) of an

other. Further, in with I locate a sense of movement, and I am heartened by the ways that with in English is often an invitation to come along, to move near, to join in proximity: “Are you coming with me?” and even the abbreviated “with me?” communicate a shared space, intimating the possibility of shared understandings and affective movements. Thinking with an other, then, describes not only a kind of non-coercive (possibly gentle) closeness, but also a willingness to move with, to be touched by an other and brought into the way he/she/ze moves and thinks and feels. “Thinking with” describes a drive for proximity as a way to craft better understandings, implicitly emphasizing how an openness to being affected by an other is part of this closeness.

Of course, if “thinking with” speaks to an openness to being affected by an other, given my description of affect earlier, why would I then pair it with “feeling with”? Why not assume “feeling with” to be a part of “thinking with”? In part, I use “feeling with” as a way to emphasize how feeling and its cousin, affect, are both part of the process of thinking and apart from it. The kind of “feeling with” this writing articulates takes up my discussion of affect’s ability to undermine conceptions of a wholly rational or volitional subject who makes entirely conscious decisions. This sense of “feeling with” communicates the role of feeling in coming into proximity with an other. This is not to say that one can or should feel the same as an other, for such a move merits the same kind of critique levied against speaking for. Rather, one should be attentive and open to feeling in a wide range of expressions, be it in the actions of a sovereign subject making a seeming decision to transition or in the movements that may belie the conscious actions of that subject, the latter being movements that happen through feeling and that shape

the borders of a self rather than reflecting it. This sense of “feeling with” embraces the ways a person can be moved by something elusive and not at all conscious, such as the movement Jennifer Finney Boylan names in describing her transition as “more like an erosion than a decision” (131). This sense of “feeling with” points to a cognitive and affective habit or a mode of attention oriented towards the register of feeling rather than, say, looking. However, specific feelings also shape my sense of “feeling with” in knowledge production.

Following Maria Puig de la Bellacasa’s insights on “Thinking with Care” (see chapter two), I understand “feeling with” as a way to highlight how it is not just perspective that shapes the kind of knowledge one produces, but also feelings such as care, trust, and even alienation. Whether one writes a bitter tirade against an author who, for example, seemingly misunderstands trans experiences entirely, or one seeks to articulate what exactly is so wonderful about a book one loves, the kinds of understandings that inform processes of writing and knowledge production are suffused with specific feelings. Simply put, one does not write about something that one does not care about, whether in a positive or negative or even, perhaps often, mixed sense. My use of “feeling with” makes this component of intellectual work explicit, positing that the process of coming to a good and/or better understanding of another’s experience can happen not in spite of but through feeling strongly about that experience and the project that brings knower and other into proximity. “Thinking and feeling with” as a formulation thus pairs the goals of intimacy and proximity in knowledge production with the need to pay explicit attention to feelings and affect in crafting better knowledge.

“Thinking and feeling with” articulates how it is not just a shared position on a periphery that can help one achieve proximity with another and enable better understandings, but also the proximity offered by feeling near, or close, can and does play a vital role in knowledge production. Part of my larger argument is that taking this role of feeling in knowledge production into account can foster better knowledge production.

“Thinking and feeling with” affect also addresses the problems of subjectivity, for this kind of thinking attends not just to rational subjects making individual decisions, but also to movements that direct the comings together that are or become subjects. If one reads a subject as a process that derives from movements and encounters shaped by affect—a moving towards, a self bounded by movement away—then it becomes clear that affect challenges the common ways one comes to understand subjects. How subjects become legible as such in the first place, through such indices as male/female, inner/outer, even hegemonic/subversive, comes into question when one attends to affect instead of individualized and often-pathologized movements and changes. This mode of understanding re-centers knowledge production, positing that one should look to the side of, or around, or even apart from registers that tend towards the settled distinctions of binarisms. Instead, an orientation towards affect reveals how affect(s) shape selves, others, groups, and even spaces between, leading to the possibility of better understandings. These understandings attend to these spaces, to the movements elicited, to the feelings and contacts with others in order to articulate a way of knowing rooted in the shapes, touches, feelings, textures, and sounds of affect before and above other registers. These contacts and the sensibility that shapes them make “thinking and feeling

with” affect a mode of encounter that encourages the cognitive and affective habits Sedgwick desires, for they promise a way to enter into more intimate knowledge production without falling into binarisms or reproducing sovereign subjects.

Thinking and Feeling with Trans Affect

As a full explication would require the space of an additional introduction, I leave the last section of my title, “trans affect,” to the body of the dissertation itself. However, the understandings of both trans and affect I outline above point to my project as a whole. And “thinking and feeling with” affect, when joined with trans, describes the specific project of this writing: to articulate better understandings of trans experiences through attention to affect. Thus the “thinking and feeling with” affect that I do throughout the dissertation is rooted in the desire for a particular kind of understanding, an understanding of trans experiences of embodiment based in how transpeople feel and in the feelings that shape the being of trans. As a kind of intimate knowledge production, my “thinking and feeling with” “trans affect” reveals my own stakes in this project, which are about intervening in conversations about what trans is and/or whether trans embodiments fall into problematic binarisms like the hegemonic/subversive divide Prosser notes, in order to direct attention elsewhere. My goal in “thinking and feeling with ‘trans affect’” is to produce better understandings of trans experiences through careful and caring attention to the ways that affect shapes those experiences and the

embodiments that emerge from those experiences. Of course, the question of which experiences are under examination merits what will be the final element of this introduction: an outline of the chapters to follow.

My first chapter, “Inheriting Transgender: Response, Responsibility, and Contested Categories,” details the often-conflicting histories of the terms transgender and transsexual. Pointing to various category problems inherent in these terms, the chapter then moves to the question of how to inherit them responsibly. Debates about “Brandon Teena” and *Paris is Burning* close the chapter, which describes the ways affect shapes both responses and responsibility to mourned and lost trans others. My second chapter, “Mapping Towards Trans Affect: Finding Speculative Language and Specific Distances,” begins by examining the ties between bodies and language that trans embodiments can bring into question, arguing for a speculative form of language that might better speak to these encounters. Turning to work in feminist science studies about epistemology, the chapter pairs this sense of speculative language with the questions of intimate knowledge production initially detailed in this introduction. A detailed discussion of “trans affect” closes the chapter.

Specific trans texts shape the third, fourth, and fifth chapters, which begin with Aleshia Brevard’s *The Woman I Was Not Born to Be*. Arguing that Brevard’s affective experience engenders a friction that ultimately reworks the concept of “woman,” my third chapter addresses the allure of Brevard’s text. I read in Brevard’s writing a striking example of how feeling shapes an experience of gendered embodiment, leading me to examine the connections between gender and ontology. Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch*

Blues is the focus of my fourth chapter, in which I contend that the protagonist's decision not to pass marks an emergence of a different affective relationship with both the novel's landscape and the larger social world of reader and novel. Susan Stryker's "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" is the focus of the fifth chapter, in which I argue that affective "intra-actions" shape both Frankenstein's and Stryker's monsters. Positing that these "intra-actions" extend beyond the page, I think through the ways Stryker's writing transforms the space of reading, encouraging changes in the reader's interaction with the space of his/her/hir world. My conclusion situates my interventions in the context of transgender studies and contemporary U.S. queer and trans cultures in order to explicate why this project matters in this particular moment. I also use the space of the conclusion to explore how my formulations of "thinking and feeling with" and "trans affect" might travel beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Chapter One:

Inheriting Transgender: Response, Responsibility, and Contested Categories

This chapter explores the emergence of transgender as a category and the ways that affect inflects debates about understanding and responding to this emergence. Beginning with a discussion of how “transgender” was constituted as an identity through late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sexological discourses as well as political movements in the 1960s and 1970s, the chapter addresses the historical and cultural specificity of transgender in order to describe the link between active category construction and ontology. Turning from transgender to trans, the chapter interrogates the ways that trans people’s lived experiences actively confuse seemingly static identity categories, articulating how the category work that goes into trans and transgender occludes the role of affect in transgender identity formations and ways of being. Discourses about remembering and mourning provide the basis for the final section, which examines the debates that followed the deaths of transgender people Brandon Teena and Venus Xtravaganza. The affect that suffuses the responsibility to the other that happens in these discourses, contested arguments among transgender, feminist, and queer theorists, helps me tie the ontology of knowledge practices to methods that might help us more responsibly figure transgender lives. I take this up in the following chapter as well, which elaborates a term key to this dissertation, “trans affect.”

Category construction and ontology

How might the claim that gender and sexuality are distinct be *productive* of that distinction rather than simply a description of the way things are? – David Valentine

We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized –Westphal’s famous article of 1870 on “contrary sexual sensations” can stand as its date of birth –less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration, the homosexual was now a species. – Michel Foucault

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault, writing about the proliferation of discourses about perversions in the late nineteenth century, argues for the historical specificity of the “homosexual.” According to Foucault, homosexuals did not pre-exist their characterization, but rather came into being through it. Foucault’s brief description highlights an overlap with the contemporary category of “transgender,” for while the homosexual, at present, is understood to practice same-sex desire, today it is the transgendered individual who figures more decisively as a person experiencing “hermaphrodism of the soul” (34). Valentine’s question regarding the division of sexuality and gender thus brings into focus the historical specificity of the divide between homosexual and transgender, making clear how the category transgender has been actively constructed through the separation of gendered experiences from sexual ones. This construction happened, in large part, through late nineteenth- and early to mid-twentieth-century sexological discourses.

Prior to Harry Benjamin’s 1954 use of the term “transsexual” in deliberate contrast with “transvestite,” key figures in sexology wrestled with a remarkable array of categories specifying deviations from gendered and sexual norms. Following Karl

Heinrich Ulrich's 1860 coinage of "urnings," persons whose sexed bodies were at odds with their sense of themselves, or "inverted," Westphal's inauguration of homosexual tied the issue of sexual object choice more closely to practices like the wearing of gender-specific clothing. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, a professor of psychiatry at Vienna, deepened this connection in his 1877 book, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, finding forms of "paraesthesia," sexual desire for the wrong object, in his subjects' deviation from gender norms. Krafft-Ebing's case studies specified different kinds of homosexuality or "inversion": "eviration," "defemination," "viraginity," and "metamorphosis sexualis paranoica." These diagnoses connected verbalized cross-gendered identification, bodily symptoms (coarse or fine features, for example), and habits (cigar-smoking and gambling), with sexual object choice, such that myriad cross-gendered behaviors were read as symptoms of homosexuality. Thus, in this period, in addition to markers of sexual orientation, characteristics tied to what thinkers writing after the 1970s would term gender – the masculinity of coarse features for example – played a role in the clinical classification of homosexuality. Magnus Hirschfeld, a German medical doctor, changed this trend with his coinage of "transvestite" in 1910.

Arguing that "not all homosexuals are effeminate ... and not all effeminate men are homosexual," Hirschfeld separated sexual object choice from cross-gendered identification (29). Hirschfeld argued that few "are the number of those homosexual men who live fully as a woman; of Uranian women, fully as a man" (29). In Hirschfeld's account, transvestism was not an indicator of homosexuality; he opined that most homosexuals viewed transvestism with distaste, and heterosexual transvestites were

predominant (29). Thus, the inauguration of the identity transvestite isolated what would be read in contemporary discourses as gendered behaviors from sexual orientation.⁸

Benjamin's coinage of transsexual added an ontological dimension to the question of gendered behavior. Arguing that "transsexualism ... indicates more than just playing a role," that it "denotes the intense and often obsessive desire to change the entire sexual status including the anatomical structure," Benjamin contrasted transsexual and transvestite identities. Benjamin defined the transvestite as one who merely performs cross-gendered behavior, while he saw the transsexual as one who desires to fully embody this change. His statement, "while the male transvestite *enacts* the role of a woman, the transsexualist wants to *be* one and *function* as one," makes clear the importance of ontology to Benjamin's criteria for the perception and diagnosis of transsexuality in sexology (emphasis original 46).

Of course, popular understandings of the terms transsexual, invert, and homosexual did not proceed apace with developments in sexological discourses. Valentine notes that, "as recently as the early 1970s, homosexuality was popularly imagined as a *gendered* inversion, and those who are understood as transgender today were frequently classified as part of a 'gay community,' both by insiders and outsiders" (15). So while transsexual and the more recent transgender were shaped by inheritances

⁸ Hirschfeld also found masochism and sadism almost non-coincident with transvestism; given the stigma of such practices, this deliberate distinction can be read as a move to de-pathologize practitioners of transvestism (33). It is also notable that Robert Stoller's writings in the 1960s have been read by some transgender activists, such as Susan Stryker, as the first definitive separation of gender from sex; Stoller restricts sex to biology and argues for gender as a term with "psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations" (56).

from sexological discourses that crafted distinctions between gendered behaviors and sexual practices as well as gendered role-playing and gendered being, these identities were also powerfully influenced by currents both within and outside of gay male and lesbian communities.

According to Valentine, the mid-1970s witnessed a movement in U.S. gay male politics whose assimilationist tendencies led to the exclusion of transsexuals and transgendered persons. In the wake of the Stonewall riots—an inaugural moment in which, depending on the account one reads, gays, lesbians, and transsexuals rioted in response to a police raid in a New York City bar—cries for a broad liberatory politics diminished (Valentine 58).⁹ Instead, campaigns like the one to excise homosexuality from the DSM, which relied heavily on the earlier sexological distinctions between sexuality and gender, were prioritized, a move that more firmly allocated visible gender transgressions to non-homosexuals.¹⁰ Martin Levine notes that contemporary “activists rejected the belief that gay men were womanly, claiming that to believe so was a symptom of internalized homophobia Gay men were simply men who loved men”

⁹ See Duberman, *Stonewall*; Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution*; dir. Stryker, *Screaming Queens: the Riot at Compton's Cafeteria* (2005); dir. Baus, *After Stonewall* (1999); ed. Bullough, *Before Stonewall*; and Ghaziani, *The Dividends of Dissent*.

¹⁰ Valentine notes that “as gay male activists argued for the private nature of homosexual activity, so lesbian-feminists and anti-pornography feminists claimed that public representations of women in pornography, or visible signs of gender variance ... negatively impacted the lives of women. Thus by the mid-1970s that which was *visible* among gender/ sexual subcultures became newly engaged as the focus of activists, arms of the state, and psychiatry” (56). For Valentine, the focus on the DSM reflected a larger trend among gay and lesbian-feminist communities towards the policing of the visible, which affected trans people in particular in that looking non-normatively gendered came to be a sign of stepping outside the boundaries of, rather than one of entering into these communities.

(57). In short, the mainstream and mostly white gay male community began to police gender norms, and while it celebrated cross-gendered performances in the temporally and geographically limited spaces of “drag” shows, such behaviors outside of those spaces were increasingly discouraged.¹¹

Meanwhile, burgeoning connections between lesbian and feminist communities in the early 1970s initiated similar policing practices. As Susan Stryker describes in *Transgender History*, a group called “Radicalesbians” staged the “Lavendar Zap” at the second Conference to Unite Women. This action encouraged broader lesbian participation in feminist politics and spaces, apparent in the flyer the Radicalesbians distributed titled “The Woman-Identified Woman” (99). Reflecting a contemporary trend in lesbian politics, the flyer exhorted feminist women to be “woman-identified” by resisting patriarchal definitions of gender roles and by prioritizing their interests and intimacies with other women. Stryker further notes that growth of “woman-identified woman” discourses excluded many of the lesbian community’s members, stating, “the traditional organization of lesbian erotic life around ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ identities fell under suspicion as examples of ‘male identification’ and ‘patriarchal gender’ that pathetically imitated heterosexual male/female couplings, and that did not further the revolutionary goal of overthrowing gender itself” (100).¹² In *Self-Made Men*, Henry Rubin

¹¹ Esther Newton’s groundbreaking work, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, explores both the temporal and spatial specificity of drag performances through fieldwork conducted in the mid-1960s United States.

¹² Gayle Rubin notes in “Of Catamites and Kings,” that “when the term *male identified* was originally used in early seventies feminism, it denoted nothing about gender identity.” Rubin posits that the term “described a political attitude in which members of a category of generally oppressed persons (women) failed to identify with their self-

argues that the rift introduced by the “Lavendar Zap” became a gulf in further lesbian-feminist conferences, and the “dotted lines between woman-identified lesbians and male-identified others [became] bold-faced borders” (82). Indeed, Rubin posits that the expulsion of non woman-identified women from lesbian spaces directly contributed to a surge in the number of persons who transitioned from female to male identities through the use of hormones and surgeries.¹³

While the gradual closing of gay and lesbian spaces to non-gender-normative persons may have played a part in the increase in numbers of trans-people on a cultural level, the inception of the term transgender and the DSM’s introduction of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) helped to craft both an incipient community and a conflicted identity. Stryker credits activist Virginia Prince with the initial use of transgender as indicating someone “who permanently changed social gender ... without recourse to

interest as women, and instead identified with the goals, policies, and attitudes beneficial to a group of privileged oppressors (men).” Interestingly, Rubin emphasizes how being male-identified in this context does not necessarily have to do with having a masculine appearance, for such woman could also be “femme or feminine” as male-identified indicated a political position not necessarily legible through gendered presentation. Henry Rubin augments this discussion of changing lesbian cultures by noting how the way its impact was class-specific: “Butch and femme roles were part of working-class bar culture and did not carry the same significance in middle-class or even upwardly mobile circles, so the sanctions against role-playing had their deepest impact on working-class lesbians” (73).

¹³ Early reports (dating from between 1940 and 1970) on the ratio of mtf (male-to-female) and ftm (female-to-male) transsexuals range from two-to-one to eight-to-one. However, Rubin notes that “the most commonly cited data claimed a ratio of four-to-one” in this time period. In contrast, in the 1970s, these numbers were virtually even, a fact which which Rubin and Stryker posit happened not because there were less transwomen seeking surgery and hormones, but because of the combination of the Benjamin standards, more widely available medical treatment, and the expulsion of more masculine-presenting women from lesbian subcultures (63). Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*, which I write about in detail in the following chapter, addresses this historical moment (importantly, Feinberg himself came of age slightly later than hir protagonist Jess).

genital transformation.” However, Leslie Feinberg broadened transgender in hir 1992 call for transgender liberation, turning it from an adjective to a noun and making it a “‘pangender’ umbrella term for an imagined community encompassing transsexuals, drag queens, butches, hermaphrodites, cross-dressers, masculine women, effeminate men, etc.” (Stryker, *Transgender History* 4).¹⁴ The inception of GID as a diagnosis in the 1980 version of the DSM, in conjunction with this changing landscape of identity, meant that persons who came to actively identify with or be grouped by others into transgender often fit the diagnostic criteria for GID.¹⁵ Like Westphal’s homosexual, the inception of

¹⁴ While much of Feinberg’s writing points to the “transgender umbrella” model, such as hir *Transgender Warriors*, in which ze groups under that title a broad array of historical figures and traditions that evince non-normative gender (Joanne of Arc, two-spirit folks from the Native American contexts, for example), ze is attentive to the umbrella model’s potential to erase difference. Describing an exchange with Gary Bowen, Feinberg notes the problem of language in trying to put together a conference of self-identified transmen, transgenders such as Feinberg, and myriad other folk who also fit into the loosely phrased “transmasculine” spectrum. Ultimately, the conference came to be titled “True to the Spirit Within, or ‘True Spirit,’” and it was open to people “who are themselves, or who are supportive of others who were assigned female gender at birth, but who feel it is not an adequate or accurate description of who they are, which includes but is not limited to: tomboys, butches, female cross-dressers, drag kings, F2Ms, transmen, third sexes, intersexuals, and others, along with partners, friends, family, and allies” (46). The plethora of terms used indicates how transgender often does not operate as an umbrella term.

¹⁵ Valentine argues: “the removal of homosexuality from the DSM was a central goal of early gay liberation activists and is central to the consolidation of contemporary meanings of homosexuality and transgender.” For Valentine, this shift happened in large part through a discourse of visibility: “by insisting on ‘normality’ and rejected visible gender variance, gay activists argued that homosexuals displayed no *publicly visible* evidence of their homosexuality, which was essentially the *private* exercise of sexuality and which was itself neither caused by nor resulted in mental anguish” (emphasis original 55). This claim to invisibility — “a dense condensation of gendered, sexual, racial, and class normality” — was in deliberate contrast to the DSM-III, which contained the new diagnostic category, GID. According to Valentine, GID “created a diagnostic place for people who had not previously been explicitly recognized as such in the pages of the DSM, transsexuals and others who engaged in *visibly* gender-variant behaviors and who

GID formalized access to treatments like hormones and surgery while solidifying the connection between the pathology (GID) and identities such as transsexual and transgender.

This history reveals how inheritances from sexological discourses and political border wars in gay and lesbian communities shaped the birth of transgender (adjective and noun) and transsexual as species, to borrow Foucault's terminology. This rather contentious history also points to what Valentine notes, which is the way that "transgender was useful to accommodationist gay and lesbian groups precisely because it [absorbed] the gender transgression which has doggedly been associated with modern ... homosexual identities for more than a hundred years" (64). However, assimilation aside, this construction of seemingly clear-cut lines between the categories transgender and homosexual effaces the complex ways people experience transgender and transsexual.

Transversing Boundaries, Contesting Binaries

If I identify as an FTM, and if I have sex with a gay man who identifies as a woman, are we a straight couple? – Jack Hyde

The bald assertion of the ontological separateness of gender and sexuality ignores the complexity of lived experience, the historical constructedness of the categories themselves, the racial and class locations of different experiences and theorizations of gender and sexuality, feminist understandings of gender and sexuality as systemic and power-laden, and transforms an analytic distinction into a naturalized, transhistorical, transcultural fact. – David Valentine

had previously been understood at least partially through the categories of either homosexuality or transvestism" (emphasis original 55).

Lived experiences of persons who identify as trans and/or transgender often defy not only the division of homosexual from transsexual, but also that of gay from straight. Further, identities people elaborate that seem to fit within transgender often contest it. Questions of legibility are also important, as many people who look transgender, or whose bodies are read by others as if they were in transition from one sex to another, do not actively identify as such, while many who do identify as such are not visible to others in this manner. And, as Valentine makes clear, many transgender people's experiences are shaped by race and class in ways that contest the seeming unity of the category transgender itself. These issues stem from problems with the terms transgender and transsexual; by reading for the productive frictions in and between these categories, I begin to trace the role of affect in varying experiences of transgender.

Valentine's anthropological work documenting transgender informants in early 2000s New York City demonstrates some of the ways that transgender people defy easy categorization. For example, Anita sees herself as "a drag queen" who lives "as a woman everyday," but also states: "I know I'm gay and I know I'm a man" (115). And Jade is "a mommy to her daughter and a hard daddy to her lovers; she is a woman" who states: "more times I think I'm a man than not" (122). The 2005 documentary, *The Aggressives*, echoes this sense of being in both categories at once, gay and transgender, as many of its subjects assert similarly multiple identities: lesbian, aggressive, and male. Valentine notes that such ways of understanding "escape easy classification," and that any sense of

incoherence stems from the categories themselves, not from confusion on the part of his informants (123).¹⁶

Modifications to “transgender” also contest the unity of the category. Valentine writes about Tara, who defines herself as “a woman of transAfrican, transgender experience” (105). This self-definition makes clear that race shapes what it is to be transgender, and that transgender alone cannot speak adequately to the role of race in Tara’s self-identification. It also places active transgender identification in the past, for Tara is presently a woman and no longer actively transgender. Similarly, Cris Beam, in *Transparent*, documents modifications to transgender made by the high school-aged Los Angeles youth she teaches and mentors. One of them, Miguel, identifies as “plainclothes transgender,” which he explains as transgenders who “don’t change the exteriors of their bodies as all; they move about the world as in their birth sex, demanding only that their lovers and most intimate friends use the opposite-gender pronouns” (110). Beam finds such youth to be exemplary “of the range transgender can be, where people fall out of the rubric entirely and invent for themselves a new place to stand” (75).¹⁷ Another way

¹⁶ A number of Beam’s informants evince similarly contradictory histories, such as Ariel, who vacillates between a male and female identity even while maintaining the same name and the same sexual desires (102). Cromwell notes a similar tendency among his informants, such as Del La Grace Volcano, who identifies as “FTM,” but “‘Inter’ rather than ‘trans’ sexual,” as “BOTH (male and female) rather than NEITHER (male nor female);” Volcano is “simply gender-variant.” Similarly, Grace states, “I call myself a ‘hermaphrodite’ for now, which I like to think of as my own custom gender blend, ... BOTH male and female” (512). And Vern, in an interview with Chris Martin in “World’s Greatest Cocksucker: Transsexual Interviews,” states, “I’m sort of fluid, and it varies with who I’m with” (105).

¹⁷ Another example from Beam is that of Tito, who calls himself a “drag boy,” which he defines as “someone who puts foundation on and certain hair pieces and shit,” a boy

of reading this type of modified language is to take it as evidence of how transgender as a category is unable to convey the texture of many experiences of identification.¹⁸

As his version of transgender is only read out to those with whom he is close, but not by others via his performance or his body, Miguel's "plainclothes transgender" also raises questions about legibility in practices of identification. Gayle Rubin, writing about the boundaries between "butch" (masculine-signifying lesbians) and "ftm" (female-to-male transpeople), points to the fact that "some butches are psychologically indistinguishable from female-to-male transsexuals The boundaries between the categories of butch and transsexual are permeable" (476). For example, someone beginning a transition may read, bodily and psychologically, as identical to a butch woman, even though that person self-identifies as a male or a trans-man.¹⁹ Further, as Jordy Jones, an FTM performance artist, attests in a 1995 letter to *FTM Newsletter*, "not all transgendered individuals take hormones, and not everyone who takes hormones is transgendered" (15). In this sense, even those that others call transgendered because of bodily practices such as hormone use do not put themselves into that category. Placement into the category transgender is thus, in many ways, a question of an

who "still dresses like a boy, still carries himself like a boy, but is more into makeup, wigs, and fashion" (75).

¹⁸ Butler's response to this category problem resonates with this proliferation of categories documented by Beam. She argues that this type of proliferation of modes of identification helps to re-signify, parody, and expose the fiction of normative heterosexual gender formations (*Gender Trouble* 184-190).

¹⁹ This same person, further along in a medical transition, would not necessarily experience the same blurry legibility. However, if this person pursued a non-hormonal or minimally medicalized transition (low doses of hormones), or if this person only had top surgery and no hormones, they might very well experience the same legibility issues later in their transition.

individual's narrative, not of an individual's being read as such by others. As both Rubin and Jordy Jones write in the context of "border wars" between butch and ftm identities, this category placement is also highly contested. One critical point in this border debate stems from transgender's inheritance of the norms of sexological discourses, which dictated that "real" transsexuals were heterosexual.²⁰

While much medical discourse writes transpeople into heterosexual identities, and even though, as Jason Cromwell notes in "Queering the Binaries," some transsexuals are "complicit in denying their sexuality, [presenting] themselves to practitioners as if they fulfilled all the stereotypes in order to gain the services the clinics provided," many trans people engage in sexual practices that defy conventional readings of hetero-, homo-, or bi-sexuality (511). The "transfag" Cromwell interviews who is in a relationship with another transman is not a lesbian, and yet his sexual practices as a gay male differ from conventional ones.²¹ Further, as Matt Kailey's *Just Add Hormones* illustrates, it is not

²⁰ In "The Empire Strikes Back," Sandy Stone points out how, after Harry Benjamin's *The Transsexual Phenomenon* came out, "it took a surprisingly long time—several years—for the researchers to realize that the reason the candidates' (for surgery) behavioral profiles matched Benjamin's so well was that the candidates, too, had read Benjamin's book, which was passed from hand to hand within the transsexual community, and they were only too happy to provide the behavior that led to acceptance for surgery." These candidates presented, in accordance with Benjamin's book, as definitely heterosexual and *not* gay, with feelings of being 'trapped in the wrong body,' unable to experience genital pleasure in their present embodiments (228). Cromwell augments this list of norms with an FTM-specific set of diagnostic criteria (510). Tropes of 'devious' transsexuals aside, these anecdotes point to the ways that access to surgery during these times was regulated in accordance with the norms of conventional heterosexual womanhood.

²¹ To note, these two individuals may refer to their sexual organs as penises even if they have not been surgically or hormonally altered. And they may not. Further, Cromwell finds that "Nontransgendered people can and do have transsituated perspectives when it comes to the bodies of their partners," citing a woman who notes about her FTM

unusual for people to transition into gay, lesbian, or queer identities; Kailey moves from being a straight woman to a gay man who dates non-transgender, or “cisgender” men.²² Through differing bodies, or bodies that, after surgeries and hormones, “end up intersexed” (Cromwell, “Queering the Binaries” 514), and through shifts in the relationships between bodies and language, such as the transwoman Valentine interviews who states “I’m a woman with a large clit” (Valentine 127), the sexual practices of transpeople disrupt not only the conventional penis-vagina model of heterosexual sex, but also the norms of gay and lesbian sex.

Modifications to transgender that reveal the inability of the category to speak to experiences striated differently by race and class, testimonies that articulate individuals’ willingness to live in multiple seemingly oppositional categories at once, problems of legibility, and disruptions to conventional understandings of the relationship between gender and sexuality that happen through increasingly loose interpretations of transgender all point to the problem of classification in the category work of transgender and trans. While the beginning of this chapter details how transgender is historically and culturally specific, these disruptions and category problems demonstrate how different people’s experiences, whether they self-designate as transgender or are read as such by

partner (who has not had ‘bottom’ surgery): “My partner has a dick. He isn’t ‘missing’ anything –he has a complete, wonderful, sexy body” (514).

²² “Cisgender” at its simplest means non-transgender. It is used to describe persons who have not experienced dissonance between their assigned gender and their bodies. In addition, there are a plethora of writers and famous figures in trans communities who identify as gay or bisexual in manner similar to Kailey. A particularly notable example is that of Lou Sullivan, who passed away in 1991 due to complications related to HIV. Sullivan is widely credited with the doing the groundwork for establishing community spaces in San Francisco, CA, for transmen attracted to cisgendered men.

others, contest the term's ability to encompass the range of experiences adequately. Indeed, the problem of transgender as a category is a problem inherent in all categories: the inability of a system of thought, to paraphrase Foucault, "to tame the wild profusion of existing things" (*The Order of Things* xv). Language intersects with bodies and divides them in ways that can never encompass the varying textures and nuances that structure experiences of embodiment, even as the subjects in those spaces speak themselves into differentiation, self-identifying with a category and bringing themselves into proximity with others who also place themselves or are placed there. This problem raises the question: is there a better way to understand those who fit into, or those who place themselves into, trans, transgender, and transsexual, than these categories provide?

C. Jacob Hale notes that his own approach to transitioning changed when he stopped asking himself "What am I?" and began asking instead, "What changes do I need to make to be a happier person?"(qtd. in Cromwell, "Queering the Binaries" 518). This shift reveals how category-based scrutiny ignores the importance of feelings, for Hale realizes that what might best guide him through changes in his body lies not in the comfort of finding the right category, but in the possibility of *feeling* happier. In this sense, Hale demonstrates how affect can play a critical role in the movements, bodily and otherwise, involved in transitions. To follow this insight, I suggest that, rather than focusing on how to classify bodies and identities, rather than trying to define what transgender is or what it should look like, rather than thinking through how people look and where they might fit, we should focus on how people *feel*. Thinking through the role of feeling in the movement of transitioning, we can come to good understandings of

how the ontology of transpeople's bodily experiences are shaped not by categories, but by affect.

(Dis)membering, Re-membering, and Responsibility

To learn to read is to learn to dis-figure the undecidable figure into a responsible literality, again and again – Gayatri Spivak

Insistence on 'Brandon Teena' produces a representation of someone more solidly grounded in gendered social ontology than the subject (recon)figured by that name actually might have been. – C. Jacob Hale

Affect suffuses two significant debates in feminist, queer, and transgender theories that ask how we might best relate to and remember transpeople, especially those who have been murdered. Jennie Livingston's 1995 documentary of the drag ball scene in New York City, *Paris is Burning*, focuses one series of arguments, while the murder of Brandon Teena, a youth in rural Nebraska who was killed, along with two others, centers another. Questions of legibility –what do the drag performances in *Paris is Burning* mean or do?—and issues of categories –was Teena transgender or gay?—have focused much of the often-heated arguments among the feminist, queer, and transgender theorists writing on the people in question.²³ Discussions about both *Paris is Burning* and Brandon

²³ As my elucidation of Hale's discussion of the Teena case makes clear in the following pages, it is unclear what the youth in question actively chose as a name. However, for the sake of convenience – I find it hard to write out “the youth known to friends in Nebraska as Brandon Teena”—and because, from what I have read of the case, it seems that at the point of death, the person in question was living as “Brandon Teena,” I have chosen to refer to him by the last name “Teena” throughout this section. Also, as all of

Teena ask us to consider how one can come to a good understanding of an other, especially one who reads as trans? Further, this kind of understanding has everything to do with the responsibility to an other, especially one who is mourned. This section of the chapter asks how affect shapes the desire to witness and remember another well, to remember and/or dismember the figure of the lost other responsibly.

Livingston's documentary famously records an important element of gay urban culture in 1980s New York City: drag balls. Comprised almost entirely of persons of color, the performers in the balls compete in categories that range from those that replicate the norms of white, upper-class culture, such as "executive realness," to others specific to the gender norms of urban working-class black masculinities and femininities, such as "banjee thug realness." While the performers are judged based on their dance skills, costumes, attitude, and general appearance, the goal for each is to approximate "realness." As Judith Butler notes in *Bodies That Matter*, "what determines the effect of realness is the ability to compel belief, to produce the naturalized effect, [for] a performance that works, that effects realness, [does so] to the extent that it *cannot* be read" (emphasis original 129). The question of whether a performance that is judged to be real reinscribes or subverts the norms it repeats is central to Butler's reading of the film, as it connects the performance of drag to the normative structures—heterosexuality, gender norms, racial domination—that shape our lives. And for Butler, the answer is both.

the names chosen by Teena were masculine and because Teena lived much of his life as male and did not choose gender-indeterminate pronouns in any of his archived interactions, I refer to him with male pronouns.

Arguing that the performance of drag, however “real,” is “a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes,” Butler makes clear that the gender enacted in *Paris is Burning* is connected to the way gender itself, however inhabited, is constituted (125).

Butler connects these ambivalences:

This ‘being a man’ and this ‘being a woman’ are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that

chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely. (127)

For Butler, part of the stakes of reading and responding to *Paris is Burning* lies in the film’s performers’ relationship with the norms they perform; she notes that “the drag we see [in *Paris is Burning*] is one which both appropriates and subverts racist, misogynistic, and homophobic norms of oppression” (128). However, *Paris is Burning*’s drag does not first appropriate and then subvert, but rather, “sometimes it is both at once, sometimes it remains caught in an irresolvable tension, and sometimes a fatally unsubversive appropriation takes place” (128). In Butler’s reading, one of the ways that this ambivalence can turn in favor of the oppressed is through re-working another system that the viewer also experiences: kinship.

A crucial element of the ball culture depicted in *Paris is Burning* is that of the houses, networks through which participants become kin; each house has a mother who guides and cares for the members, all of whom adopt the house name as a matronymic when walking the balls. Butler notes the importance of the house system:

What becomes clear in the enumeration of the kinship system that surrounds the ball is not only that the “houses” and the “mothers” and the “children” sustain the ball, but that the ball is itself an occasion for the building of a set of kinship relations that manage and sustain those who belong to the houses in the face of dislocation, poverty, homelessness. These men “mother” one another, “house” one another, “rear” one another, and the resignification of family through these terms is not a vain or useless imitation, but the social and discursive building of community, a community that binds, cares, and teaches, that shelters and enables. (137)

Butler finds that this kinship system forges a link between those external to the film who are “outside of heterosexual ‘families’” —many of the film’s queer viewers, Butler included—and those inside, because it resignifies “the very terms which effect our exclusion and abjection, [revealing] an appropriation of the terms of domination that turns them towards a more enabling future” (137). Butler’s use of “our” demonstrates the connection she describes, for the relationship between the film’s queer viewers and ball participants happens through the shared experience, “our” experience, of falling outside of heterosexual kin-systems and caring for and carrying others into new ones.²⁴

²⁴ Coco Fusco takes Butler to task for this reading, stating: “Butler’s suggestion that the presentation of nontraditional kinship structure as family undermines convention sidesteps ethnography’s historical purpose, which was to record and classify ‘other’ kinship systems and thereby distinguish the western family from them” (74). In this sense, for Fusco, the fellow-feeling of abjection that Butler notes elides the history of anthropological classifications that both initiated and reinscribed racialized conceptions of kinship. However, we should note that Butler writes as a philosopher and not an

This relationship, this sense of being one of many, part of an “us,” is one of feeling, a fellow-feeling established by similar experiences of abjection.

However, bell hooks interprets the relationship between the film’s viewers and subjects in a less celebratory light. Objecting to Livingston’s absence in front of the camera, her “conventional approach to documentary filmmaking,” hooks argues that Livingston “assumes a privileged location of ‘innocence,’” (151) disavowing “the way whiteness informs her perspective and standpoint” (156). This viewpoint, or seeming lack thereof, marks the work not of a neutral gaze, but of a white gaze “producing colorful ethnicity for the white consumer appetite” according to hooks. Further, she argues that the film’s emphasis on pageantry comes at the expense of careful coverage of the lives of the participants –hooks notes that “moments of pain and sadness [are] quickly covered up by dramatic scenes from drag balls” —which transforms the ball participants into spectacles, produced for the pleasure of the film’s often-white audience (154).²⁵

anthropologist, making it unclear if and how to hold her accountable to the history of a different discipline.

²⁵ Carla Freccero makes an important point with regards to hooks’ reading and the dynamics of the look. hooks’s critique points to the dynamic of “insider” versus “outsider,” and her position, while aptly pointing to connections between commodity culture and the production of blackness for consumption, takes up what Freccero characterizes as a common, and commonsense assumption: “that an outsider’s representation will be a misrepresentation, that is, it will be inaccurate and distorted, whereas an insider’s representation will be true and accurate” (*Popular Culture* 63) Freccero questions this sense of truth in representation, arguing that “we need to think in more complex ways” about this assumption and noting that “no one person is a privileged carrier of the truth of his or her culture, because, in part, culture is not something that can be located in an individual” (64).

As her critique reveals, much of hooks's argument regarding the film hinges on her sense that the filmmaker and the film's white audiences, because the filmmaker does not draw an overt connection between the positions of social power relations and the gaze of the camera, are not responsible to the film's subjects and, indeed, do not enter into a careful or caring relationship with them. This aspect of hooks's argument is most evident in her discussion of the death of one of the film's participants, Venus Xtravaganza.

Venus Xtravaganza, a member of the house of Xtravaganza, dreams, as the film documents, of marrying and becoming a "spoiled, rich, white girl living in the suburbs." This dream is cut short, and, towards the end of the film, the film's viewers learn that she was murdered in her hotel bedroom. Responding to her death, her house mother, Angie Xtravaganza, sadly states to the camera, "That's part of life. That's part of being a transsexual in New York City." For hooks, the film's treatment of Xtravaganza's death is irresponsible:

There is no mourning of him/her in the film, no intense focus on the sadness of this murder. Having served the purpose of 'spectacle' the film abandons him/her. The audience does not see Venus after the murder. There are no scenes of grief. To put it crassly, her dying is upstaged by spectacle. Death is not entertaining. (155)

As hooks reads it, Xtravaganza's death is emblematic of the way the film commodifies the culture it documents, for this quick treatment makes the moment fit easily into the pleasurable experience of spectatorship, effacing the dynamics of race and poverty that

underscore the ball culture in general and the violence of this death in particular.

Notably, hooks's response reflects her sense of responsibility and care.

hooks slips from the indeterminate pronouns of him/her in her argument regarding the film's treatment of Xtravaganza's death to simply "her" in the above quotation, suggesting that hooks's own anger at the film's treatment of Xtravaganza pushes her to read Xtravaganza as definitively female, something Xtravaganza herself, given her stated desires, would no doubt have wished. Indeed, hooks's emphasis on Xtravaganza in particular reveals how her response to the film is rooted in a sense of responsibility not only to the community documented in the film, to which hooks is connected through experiences and critiques of racism, but also to the kinds of legibility Xtravaganza's death makes clear. In this strident call for attention to the film's lack of sensitivity regarding Xtravaganza's death, hooks participates in a linguistic production of visibility; her shift in pronouns posthumously affirms Xtravaganza's female-ness. Further, hooks's response also reveals the kind of affective connection hooks experiences with the film. While others might find the film's silence and related editing practices appropriate and even mournful, hooks does not; she wants more from the film because she cares. In this sense, one can read hooks's linguistic shift in this passage as a demonstration of the way that her feelings – care, anger, sadness – push her to better understand Xtravaganza (however consciously) and prompt her to affirm even the parts of Xtravaganza's identity that hooks clearly struggles with.²⁶ The language of hooks's

²⁶ To note, hooks's initial reading of the film emphasizes the way that African American men in drag, in general, participate in giving "public expression to a general misogyny, as well as to a more specific hatred and contempt toward black women" (146). The drag in

response reveals how affect and understanding entwine in her sense of responsibility to the mourned other, Xtravaganza.

Butler's reading of Xtravaganza is more ambivalent. Arguing that Xtravaganza "seeks a certain transubstantiation of gender in order to find an imaginary man who will designate a class and race privilege that promises a permanent shelter from racism, homophobia, and poverty," Butler posits that it is not just that Xtravaganza "is *marked* by race and class," but that "gender is the vehicle for the phantasmatic transformation of that nexus of race and class, the site of its articulation" (emphasis original 130). And while we might read Xtravaganza's performance of gender and sexuality to denaturalize sex, Butler argues that "as much as she crosses gender, sexuality, and race performatively, the hegemony that reinscribes the privileges of normative femininity and whiteness wields the final power to *renaturalize* Venus's body and cross out that prior crossing, an erasure that is her death" (emphasis original 133). In this sense, for Butler, Xtravaganza's death reveals a critical ontological distinction, as Xtravaganza, who presumably dies because of her genitalia, cannot completely become the person she desires, she can only perform it, and she suffers violence when that performance is read out, when her realness is not real enough. However, in Butler's reading, the representation of Xtravaganza's death also raises an important connection between the film and its viewers, as it is through the film's gaze, or the gaze of the camera, that Xtravaganza is brought back to life.

Paris is Burning, for hooks, is similar, in that it is the ideals of white femininity that are performed, sought after, and adored (148). In this sense, hooks is worried about how the film might position not only its viewers and filmmaker but also its film's performers as complicit with a racist and misogynistic social world.

In contrast to hooks, who sees the gaze of the camera as Livingston's gaze, one that uncritically reinforces racist viewing practices, Butler wonders whether there is "in this film a decentered place for the camera" (136). Thinking through how the film's performances enact an "appropriation of dominant culture ... that seeks to make over the terms of domination," an agential act that "sometimes succeeds," Butler raises the question of how the gaze of the viewers connects with that of the camera. As the film implicates its spectators in this act of appropriation, Butler writes:

To watch this film means to enter into a logic of fetishization which installs the ambivalence of that "performance" as related to our own. If the ethnographic conceit allows the performance to become an exotic fetish, one from which the audience absents itself, the commodification of heterosexual gender ideals will be ... complete. But if the film establishes the ambivalence of embodying—and failing to embody—that which one sees, then a distance will be opened up *between* that hegemonic call to normativizing gender and its critical appropriation.
(emphasis original 137)

Importantly, Xtravaganza's death enacts the ambivalence of embodying and failing to embody that Butler notes. For Butler, Xtravaganza fails to completely become a woman, in body, in genitalia; it is this failure to en flesh the representation of woman, a representation celebrated throughout much of the film for its realness, that makes ambivalence possible. Thus the critical space that Butler envisions that makes possible neither a hegemonic nor a subversive identification on the part of the audience hinges on Xtravaganza's failure to pass, which many assume to be the cause of her death.²⁷ Given

²⁷ This assumption, as Carla Freccero notes (correspondence July 2011), is of interest in that there is a possibility that Xtravaganza was passing at the time of her death and that she was killed for another reason. In this sense, the reading of Xtravaganza's death as

my own emphasis on the role of feelings in general and care in particular to knowledge production, I wonder: how do feelings figure in Butler's reading of this promise?

On the surface, Butler's writing seems dry, even unemotional, when it comes to reading the film in general and Xtravaganza's experience in particular. Indeed, Jay Prosser, misreading Butler's emphasis on the promise of ambivalence, finds Butler uncaring when he argues that she "locates transgressive value in that which makes the subject's real life most unsafe" (49).²⁸ However, if we return to the promise Butler finds in the film, the potential "we" of queer kinship that she hopes the camera's ambivalence enables, we can see how affect informs her writing. The hope for connection Butler expresses belies the emotive connotations of the term ambivalence – apathy, a lack of response or care – by revealing a yearning for a "more enabling future" (137). Importantly, the queerly kindred "we" of this promising future are brought together through emotional ties, shared experiences of abjection and exclusion; the kinship of this

caused by her being "read," by her not passing, forecloses other understandings of both the reasons behind her killing and her bodily experience.

²⁸ Prosser argues that Xtravaganza's death "is indexical of an order that cannot contain crossings, a body in transition off the map of three binary axes –sex ..., sexuality ..., and race ...: a light-skinned Latina transsexual body under construction as heterosexual and female." For Prosser, "at work in Venus's murder is not fear of the same or the other but fear of bodily crossing, of the movement between sameness and difference" (47). It is not Xtravaganza's genitalia's link to perceived homosexuality that caused her murderer to kill her, but, for Prosser, it is her occupation of the space between, the middle passage that is transitioning, that lies at the heart of her murder. Thus, Butler's sense of promise in the potentially ambivalent response of the film's viewers to Xtravaganza's part in "embodying—and failing to embody" heterosexual gender ideals, is, for Prosser, irresponsible, neither careful nor caring (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 137). To note, Prosser's own reading argues that Butler fails to attend to the link between Venus's death and her position as being in bodily crossing. For him, it is not the ambivalent promise of kinship that roots the discussion, but rather the broader conceptual scheme of hegemonic/subversive, positioning queer/transgender/transsexual as performative versus heterosexual as literal (48).

we is cemented by affect. Further, the “more enabling future” Butler envisions hinges on the potential for affective transformation in this queer “we” towards potentially more positive experiences. In this sense, the affect of Butler’s response reveals a desire for an imagined future “we” cemented through caring responses among differently queer (and I would guess trans) individuals and groups.

The tropes that circulate through my reading of these three theorists –response, respond, and responsibility—are central to my understanding of their arguments. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) gives myriad meanings for respond, including the following: “to answer in speech or writing,” “to act in response,” “to react,” “to react to a stimulus or other input.” Often paired with the preposition “to” in contemporary usage, the verb respond is innately interactive, revealing speech, writing, or movement of some sort prompted by the action of another.²⁹ The OED defines responsibility as: “the state or fact of being accountable,” “the state or fact of being in charge of or having a duty towards a person or thing,” “a moral obligation to behave correctly towards or in respect of a person or thing.” Etymologically speaking, both words stem from the Latin *respondēre*, meaning, according to *Merriam Webster*, “to promise in return,” “to answer.”

It is indisputable that these theorists all respond to the film and to each other.

Whether moved to hope by the promise of a different way to look and a new mode of

²⁹ Derrida underscores these connections in his discussion of the ways that philosophers and theorists from Descartes to Lacan have denied the animal the ability to respond, “to *pretend*, to *lie*, to *cover its tracks* or *erase its own traces*”(emph. orig. 401 “The Animal that therefore I Am (and More to Follow)”). Derrida is interested in questions of language, the ways that the ability to respond might connect to the animal’s lack of speech, the way that the abilities he names bespeak an ability to produce signs, to communicate, in this quotation, a different emphasis than my own of movement and feeling.

connection, anger against a racialized gaze coupled with the need to grieve more completely, or compassion for bodily vulnerability, Butler, hooks, and Prosser are all moved to respond to, write about, and somehow answer the mourned other(s) represented in Livingston's film. Further, these movements are inextricably entwined with affect. The question, then, is whether and how they are responding well. Or, put another way, what kind of accountability, what kind of duty, what sense of moral obligation undergirds their responses? And how does affect shape this sense of responsibility?

Another critical debate among queer, feminist, and trans theorists helps me answer this question. The 1993 murder of a person known to many as "Brandon Teena," who was killed along with two friends in a remote farmhouse in Nebraska, received a great deal of media attention and brought gender indeterminacy to center stage. The mainstream media referred to the youth as a cross-dresser or transvestite. Audio clips from then-sheriff Charles Laux's interview with Teena prior to the murder regarding Teena's rape by the perpetrators of the murder reflected this lack of understanding through a more overt linguistic violence; the sheriff states to fellow officers regarding Teena that "You can call it an *it* as far as I'm concerned" (Jones, *All She Wanted* 222). Authors with stakes in the lesbian community published articles with titles such as Donna Minkowitz's *Village Voice* piece, "Love Hurts: Brandon Teena Was a Woman Who Lived and Loved as a Man: She Was Killed for Carrying It Off," which gendered Teena as female and often figured Teena as a "stone butch," a masculine-signifying woman who does not permit her lovers to touch her. Further, Teena, or specifically,

“Brandon Teena,” used with masculine pronouns, became a rallying point around which the burgeoning transgender movement built the beginnings of a political platform. Much of the discussion surrounding the case, especially the debates between the lesbian and transgender communities, highlights the connection between Teena’s legibility as male or female and the kind of responsibility that inheres in political actions that articulate relationships with and through the dead. C. Jacob Hale’s “Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead in the Butch/FTM Borderlands” documents this controversy.

Reading several lesbian and queer writers on the case, Hale emphasizes how their accounts efface the ambivalences of Teena’s life. Minkowitz’s article comes under scrutiny because of its characterization of Teena as a “wonder-boychik,” “the cutest butch item in history” (Minkowitz 27), folding “Brandon’s” gender ambiguity into “the category lesbian as part of the pathology of stone-butched sexuality” (Hale 315). Hale notes how this characterization “joins with many gay and lesbian viewpoints that evidently cannot place transgender phenomena in any framework other than that of sexual orientation, [thereby constructing] the violent crimes enacted on this nonnormatively gendered body as instances of lesbian-specific hate crimes” (315). Heather Findlay’s article in *Girlfriends*, “What is Stone Butch –Now?” similarly erases the potential for transgender subjectivity in Hale’s reading, for while Findlay approves of the “redefinition of what it means to be a man or a woman,” she undercuts that sentiment with her comment that “townsfolk discovered that their handsome neighbor ... was actually a woman” (21). An acerbic Hale notes that, actually, “what the townsfolk discovered was a

vagina,” arguing that Findlay’s reading of gender-as-genitalia “erases the self-constructions of others who orchestrate other relationships between gender presentation, genitals, and other aspects of embodiment, self-identification, and subjectivity” (316). For Hale, these and other authors who read Teena into the category lesbian occlude alternate understandings of Teena that fall outside of the homosexual/heterosexual spectrum.

Hale also critically engages authors who read Teena as transgender. Pointing to the importance of naming, Hale notes that “having a full name ... in a culture with [a] naming norm is part of what constitutes a subject’s solidity within the social order.” Connecting the “function of naming as solidifying insertion into the social fabric” to transgender-specific readings of the case, Hale notes that it is what “drives transgender activists ... to insist that ‘Brandon Teena’ and masculine pronouns as markers of transsexual or transgender configurations of the young person’s identity are the only correct modes of representation” (313). Yet, this insistence on the name “Brandon Teena” counters the fact that, “at various times, the youth used many ... masculine or gender-neutral names: ‘Charles Brayman,’ ‘Brandon Brinson,’ ‘Ten-a Brandon,’ ‘Billy Brandon,’ ‘Brandon Brayman,’ ‘Tenor Ray Brandon,’ and ‘Charles Brayman,’ a cousin’s name,” notes Hale (312). Thus transgender activists’ naming of the youth covers over important ambiguities in Teena’s own name choices.

Hale connects this practice of naming to other ambiguities in the case in order to address the multiple kinds of effacement that happen through the contested readings of the case. He argues:

Insistence on 'Brandon Teena' produces a representation of someone more solidly grounded in gendered social ontology than the subject (recon)figured by that name actually might have been. The creation and maintenance of that name as the anchoring emblem for a transgender political agenda requires the erasure of all the many aspects of 'his' life that do not resolutely conform to 'properly' transsexual or transgendered self-identifications. (314)

Noting that the youth in question never pursued a transsexual trajectory, and that Teena's self-explanatory discourse was one of physical intersexuality, Hale highlights how transgender activists, like the mainstream media and lesbian press, efface the potentially non-transgender or transsexual trajectories Teena might have pursued had they not been "foreclosed by murderers' blades and bullets" (318). For Hale, the case reveals how categories such as heterosexual/homosexual and transgender/cisgender cannot speak to ways of being that might be unspoken or unintelligible within their frameworks. Indeed, he notes that "the best evidence available to us shows that multiple future trajectories were still open for this young person, including some for which there is no existing language" (317).³⁰ Thus, for Hale, it is not just the lesbian-oriented and heteronormative readings of the case that occlude the ambivalences of Teena's embodiment, but also those of transgender activists. They too cover over the elements of Teena's life that defy easy categorization by insisting on the categories transgender and/or transsexual when, in fact, there may not be words that describe the person Teena wanted to be.

³⁰ Hale continues, arguing that "normatively gendered feminine heterosexual womanhood is the only trajectory inconsistent with all of the fragments of apparently contradictory evidence we have about this life as it was lived" (318).

The multiple effacements Hale finds in these understandings of Teena demonstrate how the living use the dead for political gain in the present. He argues that, “in a necrophagic feeding frenzy, the living have sliced this corpse into at least five different pieces: cross-dresser, transvestite, transgender, transsexual, and butch lesbian.” Taking the metaphor further, Hale argues that “the living likewise bury any aspects of the embodied self this youth constructed that do not fit their own constructions” (318). This reading articulates how the various effacements Hale describes enact what one might see as the opposite of a respectful promise or careful response to the vulnerability and pain Teena experienced. Rather, Hale’s metaphor of consumption, his use of “necrophagia,” reveals how these claims can be seen to disrespect the dead.

Another way to read the relationship between living and dead, the activist in the present responding to the death of the mourned other, is through the geographies Teena’s death foregrounds. Judith Halberstam notes that Teena’s story “also represents an urban fantasy of homophobic violence as essentially Midwestern” (25).³¹ Arguing that “the metronormative story of migration from ‘country’ to ‘town’ is a spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy,” Halberstam finds that “the rural is made to function as a closet for urban sexualities in most accounts of queer migration” (37). Importantly, this metronormative story ignores the myriad ways that, due to isolation and lack of contact with urban categories, rural gay men, for example, can adopt “an array of gay or queer identities [that are not modeled] on one stereotypical narrative”

³¹ At the time of this writing, Halberstam also goes by the name Jack. Because the piece was originally published under the name Judith, I use that moniker here.

(40). Halberstam's argument reveals how many common understandings of the categories gay, transgender, and lesbian not only efface the ways race and class striate experiences of these identities, as Valentine notes, but also assume a metropolitan rather than rural subject.

In the case of Brandon Teena, Halberstam's reading of affective geographies in which the rural becomes the locus of urban fears of anti-gay and anti-trans violence reveals how a good understanding should take into account Teena's deliberate choice of locale. Indeed, reading with Halberstam, one can see how Teena crafted his identity through the specificity of the networks in rural Nebraska in which he lived; he moved to Falls City, Nebraska, because he had friends there who knew him as Brandon. His location made his identity possible because he was legible to enough people to be read as he desired. The smallness of the life and the necessary proximity of rural society—wide open spaces contrasted with a community in which privacy is not protected by anonymity—facilitated Teena's crafting of self (Halberstam 27). In this sense, Halberstam's contribution to this discussion responds to Teena's own attachment to rural life, attending to the very geographic features that make his identity so difficult to render into urban-centric categories of transgender and transsexual.³²

³² Halberstam also makes another important point regarding Phillip DeVine, a friend murdered along with Teena: "Brandon's story, coupled as it is with the death of African American Phillip DeVine, reminds us of the interchangeability of the queer and racially other in the white American racist imagination" (35). The ways that race informs the distinctions between metropolitan and rural landscapes, those in the U.S. Midwest in particular, augment Halberstam's discussion by underscoring how otherness can move between and mutually shape race and gender in particular contexts.

Writing in dialogue with Hale and Halberstam, Carla Freccero presents an alternate approach to the question of how to remember, or re-member, “Brandon Teena.” Freccero notes that “if the queer appropriation of ‘Brandon Teena’ has been melancholic—an attempt to deal with trauma ... by refusing it as such, turning it instead into knowledge, into productive organizing—it has also been colonizing.” The problems of effacement Hale details, and the ways that that language of categories, gay or transgender, lay claim to Teena’s body, “foreclose how ‘he,’ as a ghost, recurs in ways that are not so clear, and demands not a definition but the creation of a future where categorical definitions so dependent on gender and desire might prove affirmingly impossible and unnecessary” (75). Instead of burying or consuming the dead through category claims, Freccero proposes that we attend to “the ghostly, mobile subjectivity that continues to insist beyond those categories,” that we find a way to hear the other, the Teena for whom no language exists, by being open to his ghost (73).

Freccero argues that achieving this kind of openness to ghosts happens through the practice of what she terms “queer spectrality,” a particular kind of being-present to the lost other made possible through the temporality of haunting. “Spectrality,” notes Freccero, “is, in part, a mode of historicity.” Citing Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, she argues that spectrality “describes the way in which ‘the time is out of joint’; that is, the way the past or the future presses upon us with a kind of insistence or demand, a demand to which we must somehow respond” (Derrida 2; Freccero 70). To attend to the spectral, then, is to respond and be responsible to the other in a manner that figures the ambiguity of his/her/hir touch, his/her/hir press upon us in our present, without

pushing him/her/hir into the narrow confines of our language. This sense of the press of those in the past on the present is clear in a quotation from Wendy Brown's *Politics out of History* that Freccero cites:

We inherit not 'what really happened' to the dead but what lives on from that happening, what is conjured from it, how past generations and events occupy the force fields of the present, how they claim us, and how they haunt, plague, and inspire our imaginations and visions for the future. (77)

The question then, is how to inherit these ghosts, ghosts whose touch reveals a non-linear time, ghosts that push us to remake our futures, ghosts that reconfigure the landscape of our present, ghosts that demand that we respond, that we promise, that we answer to them.

For Freccero, the answer lies in how we learn to experience the present. Citing Derrida, she argues that we might learn to understand ourselves "as 'ghosted,' and to understand 'learning to live' as something that takes place 'between life and death' as the 'non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present'" (Derrida xviii and xix; Freccero 78). Freccero argues that this approach would neither colonize nor bury the dead, for this understanding of how the past occupies the present demands a different kind of relationship with the mourned other. Indeed, for Freccero, this approach marks a queer kind of history, for "it involves an openness to the possibility of being haunted, even

inhabited, by ghosts” (86). The figure of the lost other thus touches, even shapes the present, through this open, responsible and responsive, historian.³³

Being accountable to ghosts means responding to them but not claiming them for our own. Rather than reconfigure them into contemporary (and inherited) classifications, rather than put their bodies and their deaths to work for an agenda that might elide their lived ambiguities, rather than cover over ambivalences with the certainty of similarity, we should take up the traces of the dead, the mourned others, and respond to them responsibly by allowing them to touch and disfigure or refigure and thereby reshape our present.

Freccero’s sense of queer spectrality pushes us to attend to the press of the lost other in a way that makes possible his/her/hir existence outside of our categories and frameworks. It lets us think through how we might take up the questions of effacement Hale raises, and the specificity of rural geographies of sexuality that Halberstam notes, and orients us towards other ways we might hear, see, and feel the dead. The openness Freccero emphasizes would permit an alternate mode of understanding an other. In this

³³ While I have not included her work in this section because she does not write about these specific debates, Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward* raises an alternate approach to figures from the past. Focused on texts and figures that “resist our advances” and “refuse to be redeemed,” Love takes up the question of queer pasts and imagined futures in a more descriptive manner. For Love, these figures and texts, their awkward isolation and the backwards feelings and identifications they engender in present-day queers, highlight how not all relating with past figures can or should be placed into what she terms “the progress narrative of queer history” (8). This approach involves “embracing loss and risking abjection” (30), so that such feelings about and in the past might be acknowledged as part of a project to build queer futures, rather than their being disavowed or transformed (as, arguably, Butler advocates in the queer kinship through shared experiences of abjection, for the abjection Butler identifies is not meant to continue in this future kin project).

sense, Freccero's queer spectrality responds to the critique Prosser levies against Butler regarding her reading of *Paris is Burning*, for it makes possible a kind of attention that is not focused on how the other's failure to embody reveals the potential for an ambivalence that lies outside of hegemony. Rather, it shifts our perception so that we might pay attention to Xtravaganza's vulnerability, experienced in that space of crossing that makes the "subject's real life most unsafe" (Prosser 49). Indeed, if we follow the self-description Hale offers, we might see that the kind of attention that inheres in queer spectrality, this openness to the ghost of an other, would also permit us to attend to a subject's search for happiness rather than the comfort of a category, the obverse of the vulnerability that both Teena and Xtravaganza felt.

To return to the question I posed earlier in this section, I would like to think about the kind of promise, the moral obligation, that moves all of these authors –Butler, hooks, Prosser, Hale, Halberstam, and Freccero—to write. And rather than judge whether any of the authors in this section write good or bad responses, I would like to think through the kinds of feelings that happen in and through their responses. I read the sense of openness, even vulnerability, to the ghost of the other apparent in Freccero's queer spectrality, as a willingness to move like an other, or to move in parallel, a kind of remembered (or re-membered) dance.³⁴ Butler's sense of queer kinship, born

³⁴ Gayatri Spivak makes a similar point in "Ghostwriting," noting: "In my understanding, the ghost dance is an attempt to establish an ethical relation with history as such, ancestors real or imagined.... You crave to let history haunt you as a ghost or ghosts, with the ungraspable incorporation of a ghostly body, and the uncontrollable, sporadic, and unanticipatable periodicity of haunting.... The main effort is to compute with the software of other pasts rather than reference one's own hallucinatory heritage for the sake of the politics of identitarian comparison" (70). If one takes up a queer kind of

from a shared exclusion, a shared abjection, evokes something of the early (fourteenth through seventeenth century) senses of compassion: “*suffering together with one another*, or ‘fellow feeling,’ and an emotion felt *on behalf of another who suffers*” (emphasis original, Marjorie Garber 20). hooks’s writing joins shared abjection –life as a racialized other— with a belated recognition, an affirmation of Xtravaganza’s own desires; hooks moves both in parallel with multiple others and in response to the touch of a ghost. Like hooks, Prosser draws from a shared experience, his own life as a transsexual, in chiding Butler and attending to the violence that made Xtravaganza unsafe. These authors, writing on Xtravaganza’s death and Livingston’s film, are moved to write because of their feelings, feelings which establish a kind of kinship, a fellowship, in which the various aspects of Xtravaganza’s life that made her an outsider –race, exclusion from normative heterosexual kinship, and transsexuality – mark the writer as a fellow-traveler, a fellow-feeler. However, those writing on the Teena case are moved to feel differently.

Hale, not a “textbook transsexual” himself, opens a space for Teena to inhabit an identity for which “there is no language” through his attention to the discursive violences at play in claims to Teena’s identity. His response does not mark a clear kinship –clearly he and Teena do not fit textbook definitions in different ways – but it does affirm the potential for ambiguity, and it makes possible a kind of listening for Teena’s own feelings, ones that do not easily fit into words. What moves his writing, then, is a sense of care not to repeat the violence of effacement others have enacted, a sense of caring about being careful with language. Similarly, Halberstam’s emphasis on the

kinship (indeed, the queer kinship Butler imagines), one can see in this chapter the dance with imagined/real ancestors Spivak describes.

specificity of the rural networks in which Teena lived reveals a care not to write Teena into metronormative language and identities. And Freccero's argument that we be open to haunting, open to the ghost of the other, takes up this kind of care and joins it with a move towards vulnerability, such that we might not only hear that for which there is no language from these ghosts, but also be moved by them, or move with them.

While these authors are all clearly moved by the deaths of Xtravaganza and Teena, the sense of movement *with* I read in Freccero's writing is critical. This openness to the touch of a ghost allows one not to just write about an other, but makes it possible to write with an other. There is an intimacy to this practice of relating, and through that, a sense of vulnerability. Being haunted cannot be easy or comfortable, for it means that one becomes open to a movement that pushes outside the norms of language (and embodiment). And the kind of responsibility that this response makes apparent reveals a promise to an other that is not just about using his/her/hir death to make something right in the present, but about reconfiguring the present by being open to the press of his/her/hir past. Rather than lay the figures of the dead to rest, this sense of moving with, of feeling with others permits us to not only remember them, but to re-member them, a variation on Spivak's exhortation that we learn to "dis-figure the undecidable figure into a responsible literality, again and again" (*Death of a Discipline* 75).

Re-membering is about making a figure lively again, making material, through a ghostly touch, the lost other. And responsible remembering happens through becoming lively and moving with the ghost of the other, making this refigured other capable of reconfiguring the present. There is something of this sense of being touched in all of the

author's writings in this section. The parts of their discussions that remember well, such as hooks's pronoun affirmation or Halberstam's specificity regarding rural geographies, are animated by a ghostly touch. This remembering as refiguring also marks a join between bodies and language, a juncture of flesh and words, one moved along by the author's being-affected. In this sense, responsible remembering is made possible by a writer's affective movement in response to the feelings that, for example, make the lost other's "real life most unsafe." It is the suffusion of knowledge-production by an affective dance, a movement guided by the touch of the remembered and refigured other, that makes responses become, at least in part, responsible.

Throughout this chapter, I have articulated the ways that transgender as a category is contested, first in terms of its historical specificity and then through debates among queer, trans, and feminist theorists about transgender experiences. The question of how to remember well is a question of affect, a question of moving-with a lost other in a responsible way, of being moved by a lost other in response. It is a question that foregrounds the role of feeling in thinking well, thinking with care, in thinking *with* transgender experiences, past and present. This sense of remembering as a means of being responsible through care, through being moved-by affect, also surfaces in other readings, in contemporary politics that are not so much about figures of the past, but about inheriting that past in the present. In the following chapter, I address the problem of how to remember, of how to responsibly inherit ambiguities and not efface them, by articulating connections among language, transgender embodiment, and what I term "trans affect."

Chapter Two:

Mapping towards “Trans Affect”:

Finding Speculative Language and Specific Distances

This chapter takes up the questions of response and responsibility in order to think through the conjunction of trans identities, ethics, language, epistemology, and affect in the recent past and present. Beginning with writings by Sandy Stone and Dean Spade that outline encounters past and present shaped by speculative language, that is, language that requires a risk on the part of both speakers in a conversation, I explore the role of responsibility in specific connections between bodies and language. Through this discussion, I develop an argument for the use of speculative language as part of being or becoming accountable to trans others. Turning to ties between this type of language and knowledge politics, I detail the work of several theorists –Donna Haraway, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, Eve Sedgwick, Vinciane Despret—who write on the space between self and other. Engaged in overlapping projects in philosophy, queer theories, animal studies, and science studies, these authors help me think through the role of affect in shaping epistemologies. And because these writers are concerned with the ways this space is developed through particular histories of capitalism, humanities scholarship, and species relations, they help me better understand how to situate my own intervention regarding affect.

I close the chapter by examining what I term “trans affect” in myriad texts authored by transgender, transsexual, and trans persons. Drawing from my discussion of

the ways affect, or thinking with affect, can make for better and more responsible and responsive knowledge practices, I explore my relationship as a thinker and knowledge producer to the texts I examine. In this way, I give a local history of my approach to these writings, one that speaks to the kinds of shared inheritances highlighted by Haraway and Puig. By articulating the role of affect in shaping transitions, I ask what it means to pay attention to affect, or to feeling, in understanding various transitions, arguing that such attention dictates not only good and careful distances between a self and trans others, but also better knowledge practices.

Risky Touches: Transembodiment and Language

We've all probably heard the term 'woman trapped in a man's body before.' People on both sides of trans issues will bring this up 'This phrase is really a way to contextualize the experience. It's not a literal translation; there's no real way to describe it to someone who isn't experiencing it. It was always more of a way to help people understand and I think I have a better way of explaining it. I think it's a little bit more like being a woman trapped in a gorilla suit. – Red Durkin

The touch between self and other that the responsive, responsible remembering I describe in chapter one happens through making material the ghost of another. In this sense, this mode of being responsive and responsible is a practice of re-figuring, for the dead become lively figures when we let their touch transform us. Importantly, the kind of vulnerability or risk that inheres in this practice happens, in part, through the materiality of language. This touch between bodies and language is critical to many of the

discourses in transgender studies, not only in terms of the types of responsibility it engenders, as revealed by the debates described in my first chapter, but also in light of how gendered language interacts with transgendered bodies. Indeed, because bodies, especially trans bodies, are, in many ways, borne of language and are made fleshly through it, as revealed by hooks's posthumous affirmation of Xtravaganza's femininity, language and the kinds of risks it makes possible are critical to work in transgender studies. In this section I turn to several writings in the field in order to explore how transgender writings and activism can and have altered the contact between bodies and words.

A formative text in transgender studies, Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back: A Post-Transsexual Manifesto," illuminates a critical turning point in the relationship between language and transgender, transsexual, and trans experiences. Originally written in 1987 and revised several times since, Stone's text challenges medical practices that dictate that transpeople pass—including injunctions to move to different locations and invent false histories—by encouraging transpeople to read themselves out, to speak aloud their trans identities. A riposte to Janice Raymond's 1978 anti-transsexual polemic, *The Transsexual Empire*, with a little *Star Wars* thrown in, the manifesto's title and content take aim at Raymond's characterization of transsexual women, part of which consists of a direct attack on Stone herself as a lesbian feminist. Much of Stone's writing details early texts by transsexuals that document a transition that is as much a narrative construction as a medical intervention.

Reading the accounts of Lili Elbe, Canary Conn, Hedy Jo Star, and Jan Morris, Stone notes that the critical juncture for each was “the intake interview at the gender dysphoria clinic when the doctors, who were all males, decided whether the person was eligible for gender reassignment surgery.” Lack of clear criteria in these moments, dating from the 1930s to mid 1970s, leads Stone to point out that the eligibility of each person was determined more by performance than any particular psychological model (227). Notably, these performance-based criteria continued in the form of university clinics that began to sprout up in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which openly sought candidates “who would have the best chance for success,” in spite of claims to clear-cut psychologically-based requirements (228). Further, as these clinics relied on Harry Benjamin’s definitive 1966 work, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, Stone points to an increasing convergence between the norms and language of the stated diagnostic criteria—lack of penile pleasure, a sense of being trapped in the wrong body, etc.—and the symptoms exhibited by transpeople seeking entrance to the clinics. Indeed, for Stone, these factors reveal how the prevalence of heterosexuality and gender normativity in narratives about transitions were the result of patients’ telling doctors the stories they wanted to hear, stories that fit the doctors’ conceptions of transsexuality. Of course, this convergence was due in large part to the patients’ having read the same materials as the doctors and speaking accordingly.

For Stone, the problems of these narratives, or the question of “who is telling the story for whom, and how do the storytellers differentiate between the story they tell and the story they hear?”, points to the need for new and different ways to use language

(228). Because transsexual bodies are “hotly contested site[s] of cultural inscription,” Stone posits that they themselves are narratives: “a story which culture tells itself, the transsexual body is a tactile politics of reproduction constituted through textual violence.” In this reading, it is not just the transitions that are as much narrative as medical constructions, but the bodies themselves that are narratives, stories that “culture tells itself” about nature and gender. For Stone, then, the need to change the work of language, to reconfigure the story, has to do with changing the ways these bodies speak and altering the stories that they, as texts, tell. An important element of this move lies in changing how passing works. Stone notes that transsexual bodies at the time of her first writing, through forged histories and physical passing, could not tell new stories, for they were “programmed to disappear” (230). Her goal was to change this.

In Stone’s reading, the means to change the stories that transsexuals tell lies in their potential for dissonance. Pointing to Judith Butler’s work on cultural intelligibility, in which lesbian butch and femme relationships “both recall the heterosexual scene but simultaneously displace it” (230), Stone argues that transsexuals offer similar possibilities:

In the case of the transsexual, the varieties of performative gender, seen against a culturally intelligible gendered body *which is itself a medically constituted textual violence*, generate new and unpredictable dissonances In the transsexual as text we may find the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries. (emphasis original 231)

This kind of reading constitutes “transsexuals ... as a *genre*—a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored” (emphasis original 231). In order to do this, Stone argues that a “genre of visible transsexuals” must challenge the kinds of passing asked of non-visible transsexuals, such that they might live with histories of being differently gendered and thereby experience “the *intertextual* possibilities of the transsexual body” (emphasis original 231).

Intertextuality, or reading texts in light of how they relate to other texts, in the case of transsexual bodies as a genre, means drawing from the ways that gender is read in bodies and then, as transsexuals, reading out, or reading out loud, differently gendered histories. Through this argument, Stone articulates all bodies as texts involved in codes of gendered legibility, both oral and visual. Because intertextuality invokes not just the ways that texts exist in relationship with other texts, but also a changing reader who might rewrite a text in rereading it, Stone’s placement of transsexual bodies into this field of gender-as-bodily-texts opens the possibility for new and different ways of doing both transsexuality and gender. This placement allows for dissonance, as transsexual bodies, viewed as texts, can both draw on the codes of bodily gender and differ from them at the same time. One way for transsexuals to practice this dissonance is by problematizing the “wrong body” discourse (an inheritance from Benjamin’s original standards); Stone argues that speaking different kinds of bodily histories than those prescribed by Benjamin might better attest to “the multiple contradictions of individual lived experience” that tend to fall away from the rote phrasing of “wrong body.” As this

phrasing is what accords access to treatment such as hormones and surgery in most medical settings, Stone's argument not only challenges how transsexuals are read, but also how they read themselves out in medical settings. I use the phrase "read out" here to signify the ways transpeople might use language to mark their bodies as trans, perhaps especially when passing, and thereby change their legibility, or how they are read. Stone also invokes a heteroglossic understanding of transpeople's experiences by doing away with statements that describe "the" transsexual, which produce "homogenized, totalized objects" and gloss over the myriad differences among transpeople (231). However, Stone's most critical intervention is to ask her trans-identified readers to forgo passing.

While contemporary transpeople, most especially those who have come of age in a world that post-dates the widespread use of the term "transgender," may not regard passing as mandatory, Stone's late 1980s readers, due in large part to the medical establishment, had been rigidly schooled in its necessity. Stone acknowledges this difficulty and seizes upon it as the means to establish the dissonance that might help inaugurate the "posttranssexual":

I could not ask a transsexual for anything more inconceivable than to forgo passing, to be consciously 'read,' to read oneself aloud –and by this troubling and productive reading, to begin to *write oneself* into the discourses by which one has been written – in effect, then, to become a ... posttranssexual. (emphasis original 232)

It is this move that coalesces the work of transsexual bodies as texts and their possibilities of intertextuality. The way transgender bodies participate in gender as a kind of coding, as a process of producing a particular kind of reading, combined with the act

of reading one's bodily text aloud, of speaking a bodily experience that does not align with one's currently legible gender, reveals that gender itself is a cultural production with no real origin in either Adam or Eve. Stone's argument demonstrates how gender legibility does not occur through the reading of a passive body, but rather, through these and related acts, comes about in the interaction of bodies, language, social spaces, and categories. This mode of speaking out dissonant histories, coupled, at times, with differently gendered ways of being, brings about the possibility of not just of reading oneself out in new ways, but also writing oneself differently. These are the possibilities that trans bodies as a genre offer, because they make legible experiences of sexed embodiment that differ from how sexed difference has been normatively structured.

Stone's manifesto changes the way bodies meet language by urging bodies to be seen as language and pushing us to hear how what they might have to say differs from conventional understandings of sexed difference. Because many transpeople in the U.S. choose not to pass, or choose to pass selectively, at the time of this writing, even if they do not call themselves posttranssexual, they live the kind of shifting textual existence that Stone advocates and helped make possible. One example of this would be Thomas Beattie, who, in 2008, appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show as a pregnant man, or, more aptly, a pregnant transman. The media flurry that accompanied his announcement was overwhelming, and many commentators chimed in with condemnations along the lines of "what will the children think?" In many ways, what was important about his coming out was that it did change the possibilities of what children might think. Or, more precisely, his coming out as pregnant made possible a different story about how boys are

different from girls, roles in child-bearing and rearing; his coming out engendered new stories for culture to tell itself about nature. Beattie's story, legible in his visibly pregnant body, shadowy beard, and lack of breasts, shows how a transperson, by telling a story with both voice and body in the public setting of broadcast television, can question accepted narratives about sex, gender, and procreation; he introduced a different language that happens through bodies. However, transpeople also question the ways that language functions by forcing language speakers and writers, trans and non-trans, to reconfigure their understandings of how gender happens through words.

Writing on the problems of pronouns as a transperson in his piece, "Once More ... With Feeling," Dean Spade reveals not just the labor, affective and otherwise, that pronoun changes ask of a transperson and his/her/hir community, but also the kinds of risks that are necessary for people to actually "get it" about the stakes of this juncture of language and bodies. Spade begins with a personal account of the difficulties he faces in confronting problems with pronouns:

Everyday I'm forced to confront the fact that most people—even people I expect to demonstrate thrilled excitement about the work I'm doing with my own body and mind and the minds of others to destabilize gender—can't handle calling someone 'he' whom they used to call 'she', or who doesn't look like a boy to them. (94)

For Spade, the people who have difficulties with this kind of language, who have trouble transforming "pronouns into a conscious process instead of an assumption based on social signals that have been instilled since birth," come in two types (95). The first,

whom Spade characterizes as “burden shifters,” make the transperson in question responsible for their speech.³⁵

Spade divides burden shifters into two types, one who says things like “That’s hard,” or “You’ll have to be patient with me,” and the other, a more long-term acquaintance that continues to use “she,” and, when reminded about pronoun preference, makes statements to the effect of “C’mon, I’m trying” (95). For Spade, the problem with burden shifting lies in the expectation of responsibility on his (and others in similar situations) part for the mistakes, mis-speech, or even unacknowledged bad will of others. He also bristles at burden shifters’ implication that what he’s “asking them to do and rethink may be too much to expect,” arguing that “It isn’t.” Spade’s point is that “it’s confusing and wonderful and totally fucks up your ability to navigate dichotomous gender easily. That is the point. If you aren’t confused and frustrated by using words like ‘he’ and ‘she’ to label everyone in the world, then you should be working harder” (96). In this sense, the problems Spade identifies in burden-shifting lie not just in the movement of responsibility from the seeming trans-ally to the transperson, but also in the shifter’s lack of discomfort with normative gender in terms of both language and world.

Spade’s second category is that of the person who espouses respect towards what Spade terms the “trans victim.” This kind of move involves people, often activists, who see the need to use Spade’s chosen pronouns as “a matter of respecting [his] choice,” a

³⁵ While this type of categorization, in some ways, runs counter to the larger questions of this dissertation with regards to category problems and identities, I include Spade’s categories here in order to stay true to his argument. I am also intrigued by the development of new categories that map out understandings rooted in anti-gender-normative commitments.

reading that Spade sees as uncomfortably close to a problematic form of tolerance. He notes that this view lines up with the sense that “all ‘different’ people, whether disabled, old, immigrant ... should be ‘respected’ by calling them what they want, but that the fundamental fact of their difference and of the existence of a norm should not be analyzed” (97). For Spade, this approach participates in a fetishization of difference typical of liberalism, one perhaps accompanied by a “special day at work or school where we all discuss how difference is good,” but that in no way challenges the structures that make that difference happen in the first place (97). While it seems difficult to distinguish this type of utterance from the kind Spade embraces, given that their presentation is identical –both, after all, come in the form of correct pronouns – Spade’s larger point here is about developing an approach to responsibility through language.

In his demand of his readers to not shift responsibility, to enter into language as a means to become responsible to trans and non-gender normative others, Spade helps me get at the role of speech in the day-to-day ethics of gender-related encounters. He augments my sense of how one might be responsible to trans people through not just the vulnerability of being open to their ghosts, but also the riskiness of entering into speculative language, speech that pushes at rather than reinforces normative gender. This kind of approach is both easy and incredibly hard. When teaching a class at UCSC in the winter quarter of 2010, I asked my students to use only gender-neutral pronouns such as ‘they,’ ‘sie,’ ‘ze,’ (the latter two terms are neologisms common in U.S.-based trans communities) to refer to one another until they confirmed each other’s pronoun preference. This approach reflects an issue that Spade touches on –the tie of bodily

legibility, or being ‘read’ as male or female—to gendered language, by making that tie an active construction between two participants in a conversation. While many of my students found the practice challenging, they also found it very useful, for they were forced to read the links between gendered language and bodies as active constructions and ongoing negotiations in a way that made the kinds of readings we did for the class part of their most banal interactions. This kind of assignment, like Spade’s writing, makes room in language for more speculation by putting the speaker in a more vulnerable, risky, and even curious position, a space suited to questioning norms through its very discomfort.

Both Stone and Spade reveal how transembodiment is a critical nexus in reconfiguring the ways language, as a material-semiotic practice, matters. Each pushes us to question the relationship between flesh and word. Moreover, each asks the reader to risk something, Stone by asking transpeople to read themselves out loud, Spade by encouraging the use of language in order to critique the structures of difference that suffuse it. The kind of risk, speculation, and accountability that these writers encourage highlights larger trends in transgender politics and political structures of feeling that are about relating well with transpeople.³⁶ These trends, reflected in the debates surrounding *Paris is Burning*, Brandon Teena, and myriad others, have to do with questions of epistemology and ontology: how does one come to a good, or good-enough, understanding of an other, and how does this process of understanding change who you—or we—are? The language issues that Stone and Spade raise have to do with how to

³⁶ See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 128-135, for a more complete definition of a “structure of feeling.”

relate well with an other, and how to be responsible in doing so. In the following section, I address connections between knowledge politics and transgender embodiments in order to think through practices of knowledge production in line with the risks, vulnerabilities, and curiosity that being open to haunting and speculative language encourage.

Thinking, Knowing, and Relating “With” Others

The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. – Donna Haraway

The point is not to predict, but *to be attentive* to the unknown knocking at our door.
– Gilles Deleuze

In this section of the chapter I detail the work of some of my key interlocutors in writings about feminist knowledge politics. My goal is to explore the kinds of intimacy possible in and necessary to good knowledge practices. Inherent in this discussion is a concern with what makes a particular knowledge practice “good,” or perhaps “good enough,” to allow for careful and even caring understandings. When and how affect figures in these understandings is also central to my writing. Beginning with Donna Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges,” I explore the ways that Haraway’s vision of feminist objectivity points to good positioning for knowledge producers who write about transpeople. Haraway’s sense of “relating in otherness,” detailed in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, continues my discussion as it clarifies the roles of touch and intimacy in

coming to a good-enough understanding of an other. A brief examination of Eve Sedgwick's writing in *Touching Feeling* helps me get at the ways that prepositions can re-orient knowledge practices so that they are not *about* an other, but are, possibly, a way of thinking *with* an other. Turning to Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's "Thinking with Care," I bring Vinciane Despret's sense of "attunement" into the conversation in order to illustrate the ties among affect, proximity, and understanding transgender embodiments.

In "Situated Knowledges," Haraway focuses on the question of feminist objectivity, addressing how one might balance an "account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects ... *and* a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world," a project that she calls "both contradictory and necessary" (emphasis original 187). Haraway aims to re-orient discussions in feminist circles that pit a world in which all understanding and encounters with objects are seen as socially constructed against positivistic accounts of a world in which the social and cultural do not wholly define the nature of things. Haraway works through a metaphor with a troubled history in modern knowledge practices in order to move away from these dual poles: vision.

Haraway's sense of vision is not that of its more typical discursive presence, a signifier of "a leap out of the marked body and into the conquering gaze from nowhere"; rather it inheres in a gaze that is both embodied and particular (188). Noting that "all eyes ... are active perceptual systems, building in translations and specific *ways* of seeing," and keeping in mind that vision can make us "name where we are and are not," Haraway finds in vision a metaphor for partial perspective, limited location, and situated

knowledge (emphasis original 190).³⁷ Seeing does not dominate, as it might in representations of a magnified eye peering through a microscope at an object of scientific study, for Haraway. Nor does this sense of vision remove the subject, the knowledge producer, from the encounter. Rather, this sense of vision brings the space between knower and known object into sharp relief through its specificity in location, a necessary geography if you will, and its particularity in marking some objects and not others. Vision as embodied vision, as partial perspective, as specific to particular experiences of the world in this body and not that one, as unique *ways* of seeing, makes for better knowers, and therefore more responsible, objective knowledge.

Haraway's knower, while committed to "passionate detachment," is "bound to seek perspective from those points of view, which can never be known in advance, which promise [...] knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination" (192). This knowing self is "split and contradictory," a "partial" self that seeks to join with but not to *be* an other (193). Neither innocent nor predatory, Haraway's knower recognizes that, while the positions of the subjugated may offer excellent entries to knowledge, subjugation itself cannot be romanticized (191). Her knower, aware that "we are not immediately present to ourselves," must critically position her/him/hirself, splitting into "heterogeneous multiplicities that are simultaneously necessary and incapable of being squashed into isomorphic slots or cumulative lists" (192). Through this splitting, Haraway's knower remains attentive not to the vision of a static, reified, "whole" self, but to movements and connections that

³⁷ A similar sense of vision is also evident in Karen Barad's writing on the brittlestar in "Queer Causation and the Ethics of Mattering."

reveal how she/he/ze is “is partial, ... constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to ... see together without claiming to be another” (emphasis original 193).

This split and contradictory knower seeks connections and proximities, looking to be touched and remade by an other. Eyes open to the travel between self and other that happens through an unexpected encounter, Haraway’s knower cares for and tends to the relations between knowledge and its others.

The way of knowing that inheres in Haraway’s sense of vision is curious, speculative, and risky. Her knower, seeking points of view that undo normative axes of domination, opens her/hir/himself to connections that can never be known in advance, encounters with others whose movements and touch are unpredictable. Further, in this account, known objects, the knower’s others, enact agency, for they prompt these unanticipated connections and it is their touch that is invited. Thus, “situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource.” Suggesting the metaphor of “the Coyote or Trickster, embodied in American Southwest Indian accounts” as an apt description of this other, Haraway urges a practice of knowledge production in which knowers “give up searching for mastery but keep searching for fidelity, knowing all the while we will be hoodwinked” (199). This kind of knowing is about an openness to the touch of the other, a willingness to see not *for* the other, nor *as* the other, for the knower does not claim to *be* the other, but rather, to achieve partial, finite, and fallible vision positioned together with an other.

What does it mean to see “together with” an other? What kind of intimacy happens in the production of knowledge through a knower able to “join with” an other? How close a touch, what kind of proximity, enables a join? And what kind of touch, what mode of encounter, makes this admittedly ambitious epistemological project possible? In *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Haraway offers a sense of the kind of encounter –here between human and non-human animals – that might spark better, situated knowledge, for it speaks to the meeting of knower and object, self and other, through a process of caring that she typifies as “a nasty developmental infection called love” (3).

Haraway’s writing on dogs may not seem like the next logical step in getting at better knowledge practices regarding transpeople, but I find her sense of “significant otherness” useful for delineating the kind of risky, curious, and caring practices of relating with the transpeople that I advocate in this dissertation. Characterized by “vulnerable, on-the-ground work that cobbles together non-harmonious agencies and ways of living that are accountable to both their disparate inherited histories and to their barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures,” significant otherness speaks to the ontological stakes in producing situated knowledges (7). Writing of love with her dog, one that is not innocent given its careful accounting of disparate histories, Haraway asks, “who knows where my chemical receptors carried her messages, or what she took from my cellular system for distinguishing self from other and binding outside to inside?” (2). This kind of love makes clear that “beings do not preexist their relatings” (6), for Haraway writes that “we make each other up, in the flesh” (3). The self that is Haraway

in this moment is partial, not whole, because it is co-constituted, made fleshly through touching an other, an encounter from which each emerges in “in specific difference” (3). Indeed, given that the organism called “human” is made up of numerous organisms, themselves companion species, there are a number of specific differences at play in any such encounter. And while I would not say that love alone provides the necessary basis for an encounter that makes possible good knowledge practices, the care and vulnerability, the risk and curiosity, that Haraway espouses in significant otherness certainly point to one way to relate well with an other. More importantly, while significant otherness may involve tonsil-swabbing “oral intercourse” for Haraway and Cayenne, even without that particular kind of loving, becoming significantly other requires some sense of touch, a necessary hapticity (2). Significant otherness happens through encounters in and of the flesh that make each to the other, that make each other. And it is this entwining of touch and movement with becoming *with* an other that reveals how ontology and epistemology are necessarily imbricated with affect in Haraway’s sense of good knowledge and better understandings.

I raised the notion of “fellow feeling” in my first chapter, an older sense of the word “compassion,” in looking to how various authors write about and with Venus Xtravaganza. Here I would like to join that discussion with the modes of knowing and ways of being that I read in Haraway’s writing. What interests me is how intimacy figures prominently in these phrasings, for Haraway gives us “join with,” “see together with,” relating in “significant otherness,” language that resonates with the vulnerability and openness of Freccero’s queer spectrality, the risk and speculations of transgender bodies

as Stone and Spade read them, and the intertwining of response and responsibility that I advocate. Again, what kind of proximity is necessary to good knowledge production, to better understandings of others? One approach to this question can be found in Eve Sedgwick's writing in *Touching Feeling*.

For Sedgwick, the kinds of positioning that Haraway argues as necessary to producing situated knowledge happen through language, specifically prepositions. She notes that "the most salient preposition in *Touching Feeling* is probably *beside*," for "the irreducibly spatial positionality of *beside* also seems to offer some useful resistance to the ease with which *beneath* and *beyond* turn from spatial descriptors into implicit narratives of, respectively, origin and telos" (emphasis original 8). For Sedgwick, "beside" indicates a way of relating with other texts and critical practices, of moving responsibly through the fields of queer studies, feminist studies, and literature by not trying to engage in the one-up-manship predominant in much critical practice. Sedgwick finds that "*beside* permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction ..., cause versus effect, subject versus object" (emphasis original 8). In this manner, Sedgwick makes *beside* a trope, turning a preposition into a metaphor that "trips and swerves" (Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto* 20), that redirects us to understand, once again, that language matters. With the help of Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, I propose a similar move using "with."

Puig's "Thinking with Care" examines the work of Donna Haraway, paying specific attention to the ways that Haraway's work thinks *with* those she encounters and the centrality of care to that practice. For Puig, this "thinking-with" reveals how relating

is central to feminist modes of knowledge production, and that, moreover, this kind of relating is “a risky task” (1). Explaining what she means by “thinking-with,” Puig notes:

Haraway’s thinking-with can be clearly felt in her commitment to think within an enlarged feminist web ... rendered pretty obvious through a lively politics of quotation, which gives credit to friends, fellow researchers, students, dogs... for the least idea, notion, or affect that nourish her thinking. (1)

In this sense, Puig’s “thinking-with” speaks to a practice of relating that happens through encounters that emphasize connective thinking and shared conversations. Puig also emphasizes that “thinking-with,” or the connected practice of “writing-with,” are not just about “basic intellectual honesty, academic politeness”; rather, “writing-with creates collectives: it actually *populates* the world” (emphasis original 1). The sense of “with” Puig follows here is about responsible relating, but in the sense of responding to an other and being changed by that response, not merely the formal strictures of good academic practice (1). Thus the “writing-” and “thinking-with” that Puig examines follow from the knowledge that “wording a world is a risky task,” that “writing-with builds relation and community, that is: possibility” (2). Puig’s sense of “with” expands on the sense of seeing together, the partial knower capable of joining with another, and the significant otherness through which one becomes a fellow creature (in spite of differences in “kind” such as human and dog) Haraway describes. In short, Puig’s use of “with” furthers the kinds of intimacy inherent in the knowledge practices Haraway espouses.³⁸

³⁸ Trinh Minh-ha’s sense of “speaking nearby,” first detailed in the introduction, resonates usefully with Puig’s elaboration of thinking-with and Haraway’s more general relating with. For Trinh, “speaking nearby” means “a speaking that does not objectify,

Puig's sense of "with" also speaks to the vulnerability inherent in those practices of relating that make communities possible. Noting how Haraway tends to position herself as an inheritor, "even of the threads of thought she opposes," Puig finds that "even thinking *against* produces effects, it is a sort of connection" (emphasis original 3). This manner of positioning puts Haraway inside worlds such that there is no possible outside, disallowing the disinterest and lack of accountability such a sense of externality might create. Rather, such positioning reveals how "thinking-with, relatedness, makes us *vulnerable*" (emphasis original 3).³⁹ Responsible even to that which we oppose, the connectedness of Puig's "thinking-with" underscores a knowledge politics that is always already implicated and situated in the world, vulnerable to those connections and difficult inheritances that we might, at the same time, actively write *against*. Importantly, this kind of accountability, this deliberate positioning that reveals its "pollution," its inherently impure and non-innocent vision, also bridges divisions between academic and non-academic communities.

does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place," engaging the questions of agency Haraway raises in "Situated Knowledges." Speaking nearby is "a speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it"; in brief, it is a speaking "whose closures are only moments of transition opening up to other possible moments of transition –these are forms of indirectness well understood by anyone in tune with poetic language" (327).

³⁹ Butler, reading Emmanuel Levinas, describes his sense of "passivity before passivity" through a variation on responsibility. She notes, "to understand this, we must think of a susceptibility to others that is unwilling, unchosen, that is a condition of our responsiveness to others, even a condition of our responsibility *for* them (*Giving an Account of Oneself*, 89). This reading joins Puig's and my senses of responsibility with a necessary vulnerability that happens in and through the formation of a self rooted in the unexpected, unanticipated touch of an other.

For Puig, the vulnerability of “thinking-with” coincides with accountability. Asserting that “for many feminists working in the academy, thinking-with entails also inscribing our accountability to non-academic knowledge from which we benefit,” Puig argues that this practice makes knowledge happen in a space that moves outside of the knower’s own interests (3). Indeed, for Puig, the commitment this accountability demands in care and time, “makes knowledge *interesting* –in the sense emphasized by Isabelle Stengers, *inter-esse*: to be situated in-between; not to divide, but to relate” (emphasis original 3). In this sense, “thinking-with” articulates a practice of relating whose stakes are not only epistemological, making for better knowledge production, but also ontological, changing the kind of “being” possible for both knower and known object.

“Thinking-with” inheres in responsible, caring and careful practices of relating that re-make the knower and the known through their touch. Citing Haraway, Puig notes, “the political edge of saying that ‘beings do not pre-exist their relatings’ is that our relatings ‘have consequences,’ for ‘how and with whom we connect will affect the building of our positions’” (Haraway *The Companion Species Manifesto* 6; Puig 4). In this sense, the necessary between-ness of relating that happens through “thinking-with” reflects the touch of Haraway’s “significant otherness.” “Thinking-with” is an invitation to encounters that re-work and re-make both “me” and “we” through movement and contact.

An important aspect of this movement lies in the question of how close it might bring self and other, knower and known object, or how and where the line between each

gets drawn. Puig points out that there is no formula for the space of relating that happens in “thinking with,” noting: “If there is an ethics and a politics of knowledge here, it is not a theory that would serve as the ‘recipe’ for encounters and for accountable relatedness” (4). In this sense, Puig argues that there is always a specific difference particular to each encounter between knower and other, and a “good” distance for one may be a “bad” distance for another. This issue leads me to ask: what other kind of metrics might then help one determine whether an encounter, a practice of relating, is responsible and accountable rather than, say, passing as such? One answer Puig gives centers in a register critical to this dissertation: affect.

For Puig, it is not just “thinking-with” that is important to collective feminist knowledge projects, but “thinking with care.” Arguing that “caring requires heterogeneity, care ‘interweaves,’ holds together,” Puig asserts that the attention that stems from care can help make practices of relating responsible and accountable (6). She notes, “care is a field of choice for the politics of naming/reclaiming the trivial, the details that hold together our lives as a web of relations; those dismissed, historically female-gendered, aspects of life.” In Puig’s reading, care participates in feminist projects of making knowledge about, or “thinking-with,” the others that implicitly patriarchal, disinterested, normative scientific practices foreclose, dismiss, and/or efface. The day to day labor of getting by, the small moments that frustrate in their ties to axes of domination —patriarchy, racism, classism, homophobia—this is the stuff towards which

“thinking with care” orients (Puig 7).⁴⁰ In this sense, the ability to join, to see together that Haraway emphasizes in “Situated Knowledges,” happens through not just thinking *from* a shared space, but by thinking *with* the space between self and other that comes about through invited yet unexpected, sometimes banal and/or routine, encounters with others (11). And for Puig, the shared space of these encounters is not just one of “thinking-with,” but one of “living-with,” one that makes vibrant and fleshly the shared possibility of a joint future and a shared world.⁴¹

Of course, “thinking with care” is not a generic empathy, a sense that one might feel *as* an other feels. It is more about attending to the specificity of the shared encounter that textures a mutual experience, whatever the proximity, such that the “writing-with” that comes after such a moment is burdened not just with the way an other fits (or does

⁴⁰ For Puig, “feminist politics of care are not only about describing the conditions of care in *the-world-as-we-know-it*; they are also about risky speculative politics. Thinking with the work of care in mind can then be a political act that points to a generic refusal to push away activities and affects that are dismissed as petty and trivial in a particular setting: for instance, in ‘serious’ knowledge, politics, or theory. It is an interesting affective path towards awareness of the ‘sticky threads’ that sustain our everyday world and our thinking within it” (8).

⁴¹ Haraway (and Puig) emphasize “nothing comes without its world, so trying to know those worlds is crucial” (*Modest Witness* 37). The space of encounter is not quite a meeting of worlds, but a means of becoming imbricated in an other’s world. Becoming sensitive to how, for example, cattle experience space and light conditions differently from humans, as Temple Grandin articulates in *Animals in Translation*, is a mode of worlding. As Haraway notes in *When Species Meet*, “animals are everywhere full partners in worlding, in becoming with;” ‘worlding’ is about how the touch of an other comes not in isolation, but in a way that can sweep one into, or steep one in, the experience of a world (301). “Worlding” describes how modes of perception, ways of thought, as well as materiality, make up the space of encounter. And “Worlding” situates the space between self and other within an epistemological and ontological framework, one that may not be fully understood by each partner (I cannot clearly imagine how smells organize my dog’s life) but that shapes that space nonetheless (my dog and I are on a shared venture, I am going for a walk while sniffing a bit, and she is going for a sniff while ambulating).

not fit) into the axes of domination that shape our worlds, but also the feelings that shape and remake such an experience. Returning to the question of “good” and “bad” distances, Puig notes that this specificity has everything to do with the kind of proximity that inheres in an encounter that engenders “thinking-with,” or “thinking with care”:

There are specific learnings of ‘distance’ in [Haraway’s] thinking-with dogs, and the risks of this specific relation: dogs belong to and with people, but they are not people – Haraway speaks a lot about love, but is cautious about advocating for empathy, because of risks of appropriation. And she insists that her version of significant otherness is particular to the experience of dog-human love. Again, specific situations of caring require that we always re-think ‘how do we care’, but we can try to learn from specific experiences. (12)

These specific distances and the texture of care, of shared burdens of feeling, of both affecting an other and being affected by an other in ways that remake self and other, are deeply implicated in my own reading and writing with texts about and by transpeople. Here I turn to a final interlocutor who helps me expand on the role of affect in the specific distance and the kind of care, or, in my articulation, fellow feeling, necessary for me to do a good, or good enough, practice of reading and relating with trans texts.

While Puig’s “Thinking with Care” reveals how affect is central to knowledge production, Vinciane Despret’s “The Body We Care for: Figures of Anthro-po-zoo-genesis” clarifies the nature of this kind of affect as a mode of connecting with an other. Describing a group of students given ostensibly maze-smart and maze-dumb rats (to note, the rats were neither, the experiment being about human expectations) who then discovered that the rats did appear to be maze-smart and maze-dumb, Despret finds “attunement.” She writes:

The students ... put their trust in their rats, emotional trust, trust that is conveyed in gestures, in students' bodies, in all these rats' bodies that were manipulated, caressed, handled, fed, and encouraged: the students succeeded in attuning the rats to their beliefs. And ... these beliefs brought into existence new identities for the students and for the rats. (122)

For Despret, "attunement" is a process of becoming together, about entering an encounter and emerging changed through the process of "being available" to each other. "Being available" describes how "the student was, as much as the rat, available to an event they created together," for the relationship of student to rat proposed new ways to behave, new practices of being, that transformed both of them (123). Most importantly, both "being available" and "attunement" rely on affect as bodily movement; Despret reads this sense of affect as "an experience by which both the body and what it affects produce each other" (127). "Being available" and "attunement" share an intellectual genealogy with Haraway's "relating in otherness," for they are all invested in understanding how these practices of relating shape and change both knower and other. Despret's writing, however, gives more specificity to the question of metrics I raised earlier. Her use of "attunement" and "being available" reveal how the specific distances between self and other that produce a good understanding, or at least an openness to the other, often require both touch and openness to touch. Touch and feeling as a sense of movement with an other, are central to the trust that comes out of both "attunement" and "being available." In this sense, Despret's specific distance of relating is articulated through affect.

While Puig's argument for "thinking with care" reveals how affect is central to knowledge production, Despret augments affect's role by reading it through contact and movement, through a very material proximity. I want to draw from the ways Puig brings together relatedness with the responsibility and accountability of care, articulating "thinking with" as central to the production of better knowledge and more accurate and careful understandings of others, and join this sense of "with" to the kind of affect Despret delineates in "attunement." Indeed, it is the role of affect in both epistemology and ontology that I would like to emphasize in my own writing, for while I delight in Puig's formulation of "thinking-with," part of the specific distance I write in and through with regards to trans texts and figurations has to do with the affect in the space between me and those I write with, an affect that, while tempered by my care, is also endemic to these specific trans writings and trans embodiments. This affect is, for me, very much a bodily movement like the kind of touch Despret describes, and this affect is what provides the metric through which to measure my own specific distance necessary to good or good enough understandings of the authors and figures I write with in this dissertation. Therefore, in the sense that Sedgwick's use of *beside* trips us around and away from dualistic modes of writing and doing scholarship, I take up *with*, in the spirit of connectedness that Puig defines, but also as a means to move away from, or perhaps apart from, the kinds of understandings that prevail in much academic writing about transpeople. I hope to move to the side of debates about power, hegemony, and passing, as well as the border wars about the place of transwomen in lesbian communities and the boundaries between transmen and queer feminist spaces. And as my emphasis on affect throughout this writing reveals, my goal regarding how to get at this kind of "with-ness"

is to explore not just how to “think with” trans texts and figures, but how to “feel with” them as well.

Thinking and feeling with transembodiment, with trans writings, with trans figures, is certainly about relatedness, about care, about finding ways to understand the moment of encounter as transformative. But thinking and feeling with are also interesting in that feeling, or hapticity, the touch and movement of an encounter, even a moment of interacting with dry words dancing on a page, are in line with the kind of affect Despret describes in the student’s caressing the rats; they move us away from a strictly visual register in considering the how and why of transembodiment and transitions and into an affective one. Effacement and erasure seem to me less likely in this mode of understanding that is a mode of being through which the touch of the other, dead or alive, is actively present. And it is much easier to live with difficult inheritances, with normative strictures such as the “trapped in the wrong body” trope still prevalent in medical gatekeeping, when one knows that a good, or better, understanding of the need to transition can be had through attention to discourses that fit within these norms and yet still offer alternative explanations or understandings of the movement of self that transitioning makes possible. In this sense, “thinking and feeling with” engender a mode of understanding, a way of doing, that lets me get at not just what transpeople look like and the stories they tell (and we expect to hear), but also that something that slips away, a something that evokes how transpeople feel and how those feelings change me and my understanding.

Another element critical to my sense of thinking and feeling with trans texts, figures, and embodiments is that of the “specific difference,” or my “specific learning of distance,” as Puig puts it, in my writing as a trans academic. When I began this project, I lived as a white middle class queer woman, a self-identified dyke, who was trying to better understand what many members of my community were experiencing in their transitions. In the course of my writing, though, something in me changed, or, perhaps more aptly, my reading and writing changed me, and I began to play with more masculine codings of self-representation, in dress, voice, manner of interacting. My sense of transembodiment became a much more active encounter, a lively movement and shaping that re-made me and, in the process, brought me closer to, or made me feel closer to those about whom I wrote than before.⁴² Indeed, I have taken this process further, and at the time of this writing, I am taking testosterone and living in transition, in the space between woman and transman. This change in my own embodiment has crafted and made possible a different space between myself and the others with whom I write.

My own transformations have radically shifted the “specific distance” of my feeling, thinking, and writing with the transpeople I read. While I would never say that my sense of thinking and feeling with other transpeople happens because my experience

⁴² In the midst of this, I had an interesting conversation with a then-girlfriend, who had spent an afternoon trying to pry out of me why I had shifted my gender and become, in my own phrasing, more genderqueer. And I could not render into words what it was that had prompted my change. Or, at least, I had no words that would make sense to her. She commented that it was funny as my dissertation, in focusing on affect, was in essence about elements of people’s gender transformations for which there are no words, at least no easy ones, a curious resonance with my own process of inexplicable, to me and those around me, transformation.

is the same as theirs, which it most certainly is not, my changing self, and the way this self came about through being changed by reading with trans authors, has made the space between us intimate. The way that I feel closer in “kind” and capable of getting at the emotions of specifically trans experiences—such as the frustration of pronoun changes that Spade writes about—has thickened the space of relating in my writing and shifted my stakes as a reader and writer, making the kind of witness that I write in and through more textured with understandings of what it is like to have and be moved by feelings resonant with those I trace in the writings of trans authors. And in many ways, in spite of how far apart our experiences are, I find myself reading for little pieces of me in the accounts by and about other transpeople, little slivers of understanding that are not so much about “getting it” about their lives, but about possibly coming to a better understanding of my own. In this sense, my writing with these authors is an active encounter that constantly reshapes me because I find these writers, and especially their feelings, diffracted in my own experiences. The specific distance of the space between these writers and me is different from my earlier forays into the project, more intimate in that it is more personal, in that it actively remakes me. I wouldn’t call this distance love, or even empathy, but I do think of it as something like “fellow feeling,” the etymologically older definition of compassion that Garber cites. I feel fellow in that I am near in kind, close in feeling, to those I write with, for they make me feel and they help my own movements and feelings make sense to me in a way that is not necessarily legible to the naked eye, in spite of the importance of Haraway’s metaphor of vision in my writing. I feel close to those I write with, because the ways that feeling works in and

through them, moving and changing them, also moves and changes me.⁴³ This sense of feeling is central to my achievement of proximity, or, in terms of epistemology, what I might term my achievement of a “trans standpoint.” This sense of feeling, “trans affect,” focuses the next and final section of this chapter.

Trans Affect

For those early transsexuals I knew, surgery was not intended as a springboard into a self-aggrandizing spotlight. We weren’t public in our discussions. Our unusual history was not used to elicit sympathy or to seek political clout. We had grown to adulthood in emotional pain. We understood what it meant to hurt. We wanted to put that life behind us. In a more perfect world, I might have cared about things such as vaginal depth or sensation. I might have wanted a vaginal canal the size of a dinner roll. I might even have wondered what my surgeon was talking about when using words such as *labia* and explaining that my penis would be used to construct it, thereby ensuring sexual stimulation. I shut out technical explanations. *I simply wanted my emotional and physical pieces aligned.*
– Aleshia Brevard

Rarely do transsexual people represent themselves as creative agents in their own transformation. – Jameson Green

⁴³ Of course, there are stark differences in our respective telos, as my transition is temporally different from those of many others, and our experiences of axes of domination differ, for my trans-ness is not shaped in the same way as that of trans men of color, nor is it as oriented towards masculinity to the exclusion of femininity in the manner that some others are. In addition, stories from different historical moments and geographical locations also demarcate important divergences in our respective experiences, as do distinctions in terms of whether transitions towards becoming male or female or neither. These differences matter, for they do shape the kind of partial perspective, the proximity, I attain with varying accounts. But/and, while mutable, the sense of feeling I describe still draws me to them and keeps me close.

The “thinking and feeling with” that I describe in the previous section happens through a specific mode of attention, a way of reading texts by transpeople. This section of the chapter explains what that mode of attention is by examining a number of moments in trans narratives that speak to what I term “trans affect.” Before I begin, I would like to backtrack a little and speak to my initial frustration in researching transgender and transsexual texts, particularly memoirs. As Sandy Stone emphasizes in “The Empire Strikes Back,” due to medical gate-keeping, many narratives describing transitions sound, well, the same. More precisely, the stories told by many transfolk fit Harry Benjamin’s original criteria: a sense of being trapped in the wrong body, lack of genital pleasure, heterosexual orientation, a desire for other sex organs (whatever the cost or function of the future ones), all of which have been experienced for most of the subject’s life. When reading these accounts, mostly published between the mid 1960s and 2010, I had a hard time telling whether the person in question was writing the story he/she/ze was expected to tell, or if that story really did speak to lifelong feelings and desires, or, even murkier, if his/her/hir writing might be part expected fiction, part heartfelt narrative. I was also frustrated because I could not figure out, due to the uncanny (or really, expected) similarities of the stories I read, what transitioning, or the desire to transition, actually *felt* like. It was when I started thinking more clearly about my need to get a good sense of the feelings of these authors that I realized I could look for and pay attention to feeling in terms of affect: a bodily, sensual experience that is at once movement and emotional state. And it is this sense of affect that I write with here.

“Trans affect” does away with divisions between narratives that fit into Benjamin’s criteria, and those that do not, such as the protagonist of Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*, for it is present in both. Further, I can read with “trans affect” in stories that emphasize a unique self, gender made legible through the depiction of an individual’s heroic struggle, as well as those that articulate a more overtly social basis for the construction of a gendered self. Indeed, the sense of “trans affect” I read with suffuses, in some form or another, the majority of the accounts I read, allowing me to pursue the project of looking to the side of the norms and oppositions that tend to frame presentations, and re-presentations, of transitions, and pushing me to read *with* them.

At this point in my writing, you are no doubt wondering what exactly I mean by “trans affect.” In answer, I give you an excerpt from Aleshia Brevard’s memoir, *The Woman I Was Not Born to Be*. It was through my first encounter (and many subsequent ones) with this moment in Brevard’s writing that I began to see, or more aptly, read and feel “trans affect.” The following vignette, which occurs during Brevard’s days working in Reno’s burlesque scene in the 1960s, is about passing. And, at the same time, it is not.

When I arrived for work, my boss called me into her office. She explained that she was having a problem with ‘one of the employees.’ Someone, she said, was questioning my gender.

“I’m going to have a look-see.”

“Oh God, why me?” I asked as I dropped my drawers. “What the hell,” I told myself. “You’ve passed far closer inspection than this. Don’t make a big deal of it.” I stood there, exposed, for management’s perusal.

Club Basin Street’s tough little manager took her time browsing and then walked to the office door.

“Looks like a *mat* to me,” she yelled out to no one in particular, “and I’ve seen a million of ‘em!”

That was the end of that. I should have offered her a cigar. (120)

My initial response to this story mingled laughter with relief that Brevard had, indeed, passed inspection. Read in the context of passing, the moment seemed similar to a number of other experiences I had read, layered with other similar and fearful events (Brevard’s as well as those of others) and tinged with the apprehensive knowledge of other failed inspections that end in brutality and even death. However, the feel of something elusive in the moment caught me, and, returning to it again and again, I sensed something slip through the framework of passing, the question of being legibly female or not, that the manager asks of Brevard. What I term “trans affect” impels this slippage.

When Brevard passes inspection, she moves into an exuberant legibility as female; one imagines that her cigar might read along the side, “It’s a Girl!” Her joyful sense of emergence reveals that the moment she experiences, in which fear and anxiety shift to joy, is important not just because she passes, but because her feelings texture and order her becoming female. This is a moment that promises a new sense of self, an emergent alignment of body, gender, desire, and feeling, one shaped not by a surgeon’s touch (or not only by it), but by an encounter that engenders a self through the movement of emotion, the impulsion of affect. The affect that suffuses this moment reveals how Brevard’s becoming the woman she “was not born to be,” the title of her memoir, happens not just through somatic changes or shifts in gendered behavior, but

through feeling –hopeful, happy, alive, able to thrive. The movement of this moment, this alluring slippage, lured me into a mode of attention to texts authored by self-identified transgenders, transsexuals, and trans people that helped me better understand them and promised the means to think and feel *with* their writing.

“Trans affect” describes the role of affect in shaping transgender embodiments, but it is not a term with a single meaning. What I point to with “trans affect” are the many ways that affect informs transitions between genders as well as the processes, linked and not, of becoming transgender and transsexual. In line with contemporary writers who have dropped the “gender” and “sexual” from the trans, I use “trans” to evoke a broad and still politically charged mode of understanding gender and transition. I pair it with “affect” to point to the ways affect, as a bodily movement that usurps individual subjectivity, a movement both social and personal, is key to producing good understandings of the processes of being and becoming trans. And I leave a space between the words deliberately, without a hyphen or slash, because I want to highlight the ways that the terms can and should continue to exist in a slippery relationship, with no predetermined way in which they might come to meet. Just as the specific distances between knower and other are endemic to each encounter with no pre-determined recipe for “good” and “bad” distances, as Puig highlights, so the connections between being or becoming trans and affect are multiple. The ways that trans and affect connect happen in and through many forms, in different metaphors and through different modes, and the space between the words evokes the myriad possibilities of these connections rather than flattening them into a singular expression. This section of the chapter thus elucidates

neither “transaffect,” nor “trans-affect,” nor “trans/affect,” but rather “trans affect” as a means to describe and to highlight how affect, in many forms and many ways, is key to myriad modes of doing and becoming trans. These points of connection come in multiple forms, as the following discussion illustrates, and the ways they slip through the grasp of any unifying description underscores the slippage of the space between trans and affect in “trans affect,” a space that highlights an unstable and important relationship that cannot be contained by a static signifier, a space of difference rather than sameness.

In the following discussion, I outline several predominant themes in writings by transpeople about being trans. Each theme illustrates a mode of interpretation of experiences of being trans (however broadly defined that “trans” may be) that resonates with my use of “trans affect.” The specific metaphors of these affects reveal very different feelings at work, very different kinds and ways of becoming trans that demarcate a wide range of affects, trans, and “trans affects.” By reading them in a manner oriented towards the affects that organize and move them, I articulate a mode of understanding that attempts to think and feel with these authors by attending to the register and metric of affect. In this sense, I am not focused on questions of telos, social worlds, or any of the number of ways, popular and academic, that people use to write about individuals who undergo transitions. Instead, the groupings I work through are organic to specific conjunctions of trans affects. I begin with writings that speak to individualistic self-expression as key to trans identities, then turn to works that emphasize the metaphysical. Questions of legibility orient the subsequent theme, and the

final theme is that of feeling itself. Throughout this discussion, I explore how changing junctions of trans and affect produce different kinds of transitions and different modes of doing gendered and transgendered embodiment.

Realization of the self is crucial to much of the writing by transpeople on the nature of being transgender.⁴⁴ Donna Rose notes in her memoir, *Wrapped in Blue*, that “being transsexual is about *self* It is about the need to express yourself in a way that feels comfortable and natural” (emphasis original 229). However, for Rose, that sense of self is informed by complexity, which she sums up as “the whole is more than the sum of its parts” (228). Linda Phillips writes that while her parents’ liberal notions about gendered clothing meant that she was never forced out of cross-dressing, it wouldn’t have mattered, for she states: “it was not the clothes I was after, it was the desire to be

⁴⁴ Cressida Heyes critiques narratives of individualism coupled with transsexuality and transgenderism through a careful reading of Feinberg’s advocacy for “freedom” of gender expression (*Trans Liberation* 24). Arguing that “this language of “freedom” makes gender a purely personal, individual expression, ignoring the ways that gender is caught up in sexism, classism, racism, etc.,” Heyes posits that Feinberg’s (and others’) call for “freedom of gender expression” misses the ways that gender is a social relationship, deeply informed by other social structures such as race and class. For Heyes, there is no “free” space into which one might step and express a unique and individual gender, for the spaces through which an individual subject moves are always already shaped by specific –via class, race, sexuality—formations of gender. She goes on to note that, “missing from (Feinberg’s) rhetoric is any rich account of the ethics of self-transformation, which would be informed by consideration of how specific gendered ways of being fit into a web of possibilities and repressions” (55). For Heyes, Feinberg’s mode of thinking gender freedom is irresponsible, for it fails to consider the dynamic of the individual as situated within and made possible by a society, and it does not speak to the power dynamics that help form any kind of gender expression fits into. While I am sympathetic to Heyes’ argument, I am also aware that, historically, many of the theories that address transgender identities and embodiments do focus on these factors. Feinberg’s position strikes me as naïve, but I am sympathetic to the underlying impulse, perhaps especially given the problems with medical gatekeeping that others have shared with me.

who I really was” (38). And Jan Morris, one of the most famous trans women of the twentieth century, characterizes her bewilderment in terms of self:

That my inchoate yearnings, born from wind and sunshine, music and imagination – that my conundrum might simply be a matter of penis or vagina, testicle or womb, seems to me still a contradiction in terms, for it concerned not my apparatus, but my *self*. (emphasis original 22)

However, for Morris, “gender is not physical at all,” it is “insubstantial, it is soul, perhaps, it is talent, it is taste, it is environment, it is how one feels, ... it is more truly life and love than any combination of genitals, ovaries, and hormones.” And not unlike Rose’s sense of complexity, Morris’s sense of gender is “the essentialness of oneself, ... the fragment of unity” (25). These accounts of movements towards being unique individuals through the pursuit of specifically gendered embodiments, while drawing in part from discourses of neoliberal citizenship that emphasize the ability of rational actors to choose their lives’ paths, also enact something different. Morris’s “inchoate yearnings,” Phillips’s sense of something more than clothing, beyond mere legibility, Rose’s complex self, more than “the sum of its parts,” all reveal navigations of gendered experience driven by a sense of a social and legible self, yes, but a self that goes beyond the individual in being moved by yearning, desire, a self shaped by a sensibility that exceeds the individual it seeks to craft. In this movement I read a form of “trans affect,” for feelings in the shape of desire, feelings that exceed the individual subject, motivate these understandings and move these authors through transition and into new understandings of who they are. Affect is fundamental to these writers’ transitions and senses of self.

Morris's use of gender is also metaphysical. I read in her sense of gender as "insubstantial," as "soul," a question as to the relationship between matter and meaning. Leslie Townsend echoes this, noting upon her return from an appointment with a doctor who mistook her issues to be specific to sexual orientation: "On the train ride home I thought about how my motivation was born of how I felt deep inside my soul, not who I wanted to have sex with" (13). Gary Bowen, writing as "a gay transman of Apache and Scotch-Irish descent, left-handed and differently abled" (63), argues, "transgendered people, combining elements of male and female, are at the interstice of the material and spiritual worlds" (64). And Juan Alejandro-Lamas gives us the neologism "genderfusion," opposed to genderConfusion:

The (he)art of physically, mentally, and spiritually fusing one's gender with education, self-knowledge, and passion. The state of fusing oneself into a singular physical body. An occurrence that involves the production of a union of the self. (113)

These accounts resonate in their emphasis on re-combining materiality and spirituality through the ontology of becoming transgendered. And each speaks to a whole that is more than the sum of its parts, a crafting of self that happens through a movement driven by passion, soul, a desire not legible through the lens of simple self-discovery or physical change. This kind of movement demonstrates another join between "trans" and "affect," for like the authors who describe a self greater than the sum of its parts, they reveal a form of change motivated by feelings that usurps the singular, sovereign subject. Further, this movement reveals a gendered self rooted not in genitalia and secondary sex characteristics, but rather in something both more and less corporeal, soul. This type of

motion through affect operates on a different register than that described in Brevard's and Rose's accounts, revealing a variation on the connection between trans and affect.

Some trans authors emphasize the metaphysical and a more explicit sense of social connectivity and spatial orientation. For example, Tucker Lieberman argues that "whatever gender current or ... vector we have, ... we are all pursuing the question of how to be at peace with our bodies in the world and to realize, through that peace, the true meaning of it all." For Lieberman, "gender can be a way of discovering our deepest common human nature" (26). Michael notes that, while he has always been masculine in his innermost essence, his physical manhood "took rigorous preparation, great sacrifices, tremendous risk, high cost, and a singleness of purpose." He sees his achievement as a journey about "following one's bliss," noting "this journey, this bliss, is my manhood" (120). And Marcus Rene Van states:

My trans sexuality is the mental and physical pleasure existing in the same space. It's a fragile world, constructed on beliefs and acceptance, and mirrored in a partner's gaze. This is not to say that it is all a mind game: that undercuts the fact that the connection between partners is visceral

and real. Our worlds are connected at some place that reaches beneath the surface. (54)

Each of these authors sees his transsexuality as both metaphysical, a reworking of the touch between flesh and spirit, and directional, either oriented towards another, like Rene Van, or made possible through a vector, or a journey. While this sense of soul resonates with the metaphysical accounts I read above, the added dimension of direction

gives their motion through affect a velocity. These authors describe a state of being made possible through travel, through movement as a bodily, sensual experience, one that is also an emotional state, for it is shaped by the authors' desires: for bliss, acceptance, and peace. These authors delineate trans affect in terms of speed and direction, a spatialized conjunction that demarcates a different sense of "trans affect" than my previous authors.

Rene Van's navigation of "trans sexuality," a phrasing that emphasizes sexual experiences as inflected by his being trans, denotes how the space between self and other in sexual encounters involves questions of legibility. CJ Gross, writing about his contentment in S/M circles, articulates the importance of legibility to this self-conception, noting that when in play spaces he found there were places inside him "that were very male that [he] could finally be out about," that finally, he "was not alone" (133). Importantly, this sense of legibility and even fellow feeling happens through encounters. And while each emphasizes the way one becomes a self through the eyes of others, each also happens through affect. Both Rene Van and Gross connect through touch, be it that of a kiss or a whip, that engenders the feeling of validation. The difference between these modes of understanding and those that emphasize complexity and metaphysics is important, for these authors describe ways of becoming who they are that are social, not nearly as personal and seemingly individual as those discussed earlier. That sociality underscores how self-understanding can exceed a singular subject, such that to become one is to become with many, as Puig might put it. This is a mode of

becoming that, in its reliance on movement and contact, echoes the sense of affect Despret articulates.

Conversely, a drive to be illegible or unrecognizable also informs the perspectives of certain trans authors. Boots Potential, writing about his desire to combine an obsession with B-movie monsters, gender transgression, political engagement, and “an unquenchable urge to fuck shit up,” notes how, eventually: “I became the monsters I used to watch” (34). For him, monsters “open up new and unfamiliar categories with regard to their bodies” (35). This sense of monsters as category-breakers shapes Potential’s conception of becoming trans, and he argues that thinking of “gender-as-monster” gave him “a tangible example and concept of how I could explain my transness outside of the medical model” of Gender Identity Disorder (38). Evincing an analogous desire to be illegible, Reid Vanderburgh, who writes as a guy who is more comfortable with male than female pronouns, finds that he does not really feel “like a man”:

I’m living *la vida medea* –life in the middle. I have not crossed the bridge from ‘female’ on one side, over an immeasurable chasm, to become ‘male’ on the other side. Rather, I have *become* the bridge. (emphasis original 107)

Both Vanderburgh and Potential are moved by a desire, however differently expressed, to be illegible to the world in order to change how dichotomous gender works. Social in its anti-sociality, this movement towards illegibility, or non-normative gender, is affective. Potential’s urge to “fuck shit up” motivates his bodily movement; his desire for transgression changes his body. Vanderburgh’s body-as-bridge, shaped by “not really

feeling like a man,” is a movement towards change spurred by feeling neither male nor female, feeling something else (107). These authors experience a different sense of trans from those discussed above, for in many ways their respective transitions push them away from other understandings of transgender. And yet this movement away is still rooted in affect, revealing another way affect as feeling and movement shapes processes of transition, and demonstrating another form of “trans affect.”

Kate Bornstein, an activist committed to gender transgression in a manner similar to Vanderburgh and Potential, also describes her transition as motivated by feeling disconnected from her assigned gender. She writes:

I’ve no idea what ‘a woman’ feels like. I never did feel like a girl or a woman; rather, it was my unshakable conviction that I was not a boy or a man. It was the absence of a feeling, rather than its presence, that convinced me to change my gender. (24)

In contrast, Dana states how he “didn’t feel compelled to look female anymore” after spending time in a lesbian community; living in this space gave him the freedom to begin “sorting out [his] male feelings without being completely alone.” He notes: “By ‘male feelings’ I mean that I would feel these urges of satisfaction when I was mistaken for a man, and I did things like shaving ... and lifting weights, trying to alter my physique” (86). While Bornstein’s transition is motivated by a deep sense of not being male and Dana’s by feeling definitively male, in both cases feeling is key to their respective transitions. Bornstein’s “unshakeable conviction” is a feeling, an urge that moves and changes her, and her lack of feeling female is also a sense of feeling neither female nor male. Importantly, the lack of gendered feelings Bornstein describes and Dana’s

specifically gendered feelings in many ways do not match any of the above accounts, for these authors articulate feelings specifically related (through connection and aversion) to masculinity and femininity that move them to transition. And yet feeling moves both of these authors to transition, revealing the primacy of affect in their becoming transgendered. Dana's "urges of satisfaction" also highlight another key affective thread in trans writings: the desire for happiness or comfort.

For some trans people, such as Jacob Hale, the desire that motivates a transition stems from asking the question: "What changes do I need to make to be a happier person?" (qtd. in Cromwell, "Queering the Binaries" 518). Gavriel Alejandro Levi Ansara echoes this sentiment in stating his reason for transitioning as a "desire for happiness and peace of mind" (93). Noting "I tried doing everything that everyone else did just to feel in place, but still I was unhappy," B.J. finds that it was only through altering the gender of his body that he could begin to move away from his unhappiness to a more comfortable place (66). And Dragon Xcalibur, writing after chest surgery, notes:

It is as though the man and the little girl within have finally joined hands in alliance and love –much love! They both have a flat chest, you see. It is so good to have her back again and strong in me. (77)

Xcalibur's exultant love and his joy in the active presence of his younger self in his older body resonates with Ansara's and Hale's desires for happiness as well as B.J.'s need to stop being unhappy. For each, transitioning makes it possible to thrive. In each I read

distinct connections between trans and affect, for their respective bodily changes are textured and ordered by specific feelings: love, joy, and happiness.

In some instances, feeling fits into the stories people tell about their transitions as a means to become more comfortable, more right. Johnny Giovanni Righini writes about putting bags of water into his little girl panties as a young child, and notes, “This is the first time I can truly remember feeling power,” and that “something about this power felt so substantially correct” (77). Brevard’s description of how she needed to have her “emotional and physical pieces aligned” echoes Righini, for her desire is about the need to feel her pieces match up in a way they did not before, a variation on feeling “correct” (30). In these two authors I read important and distinct connections between “trans” and “affect,” for their desires are not necessarily for new bodies or transitions with finite end-points –power and alignment are not stories that finish in a definitive telos – but for a means to reconfigure how their bodies and their feelings join. They reveal how transitions can be processes of being moved by affect as bodily feeling rather than the decision of individual rational actors. In addition, they demonstrate how transitioning can create better connections between body and feeling. And they show how transitioning can be important not for overtly political reasons, but because it allows one to *feel* better.

The ways that trans and affect connect in these latter accounts oriented specifically towards feeling better, not-unhappy, aligned, also demonstrates how affect can shape transitions in a way that usurps the notion that transpeople actively decide to transition. Just as Rei Terada notes that “passion drives intentional subjectivity to its self-

undoing” (5), some conjunctions of trans and affect disarticulate and reconfigure what it means to be a subject, specifically a transgender or transsexual one. In the film *Still Black*, Ethan Thomas Young notes, “I’m not doing this to make my life easy or hard, you know. It’s not a choice that I have, it’s something that I have to do, you know, in order to be comfortable and to *live*” (emphasis added). Somewhat similarly, in her memoir, *Squirrel Cage*, Cindi Jones describes a constant inner companion, a squirrel, whose insistence on pushing her through a difficult life path –making her become a woman, driving her to excel in her studies, pushing her to seek help rather than commit suicide – makes it impossible for her to live as the white, Mormon, husband and father that her logical self wants to be. While Jones is emphatic that she didn’t “‘know’ [she] was a woman trapped in a man’s body” (72), her squirrel tells her that she is a decidedly female squirrel, and that they are “one and the same” (91). Late in her memoir, Jones wonders:

I had once thought that squirrel pushed me so hard as a defense mechanism to fight against my gender dysphoria. I believed that if I did other things, if I excelled, I could tame the beast I still face struggles. Squirrel continues to run in her exercise wheel. She pushes and she prods. It is because of her that I continuously reinvent myself. (224)

Jones’s lack of volition, apparent in her sense of having her life, especially her transition, shaped by the dictates of a female squirrel, reveals how the desires that impel her transition rework the way her self, body, and feeling come into contact in spite of her conscious desire or will. Jones’s squirrel, a fundamentally different metaphor from any of those used by other authors discussed, reveals a self driven by a completely distinct other

whose primary role is to counter to the dictates of Jones as a subject.⁴⁵ This sense of direction suggests that Jones is moved to transition by something outside of her control. In her book, *She's Not There*, Jennifer Finney Boylan evokes a similarly non-volitional connection between affect and her becoming trans.

The moment Boylan tells her best friend, Richard Russo, about her transsexuality, demonstrates a junction of trans and affect in which change, feeling, and body are inextricable. Moments after Russo reassures her, “if you’re going to be a woman, well, Jesus ... you’ll be my friend as a woman,” the question of Boylan’s “decision” –to change sex, to change her marriage, to change her life—comes up. In response, Boylan remarks, “It’s not a decision ... it’s just something that is It’s more like an erosion than a decision” (131). Boylan’s description of a decision that is not one, or one that that is a long-overdue loss of resistance to change –bodily, social, familial—renders her shift a force to which she accedes rather than a willful choice she enacts. The impulsion of her feelings and her body move her to become other than what she was. It is not a conscious decision on her part. This movement through an erosion that is a loss of resistance, the ground turned to mud that hastens the house’s fall down the hillside, happens in a disparate metaphoric register from Jones’s squirrel, for Boylan’s movement is an acquiescence to a landslide of feelings that overwhelms her and pushes her until she cannot resist any more. This sense of transition as motivated by erosion reveals another

⁴⁵ It is notable that Jones’s squirrel does not itself experience the frustration of a life hemmed of an actual squirrel. It would be interesting to think through the ways that predation, seasonal weather, and resources shape Jones’s experience of the squirrel, for a trans-species trans encounter this surely is.

form of trans affect shaped by feelings that Boylan cannot control, feelings that, in many ways, control Boylan.

The different ways that trans joins with affect in the above accounts helps me get at how transitioning is about feeling as well as looking. Moreover, in reading for the distinct ways these authors experience the space of connection between trans and affect, I am interested in the differences in language that reveal distinct alignments of body, gender, desire and feeling. These differences do not highlight identity categories, but rather point to the feelings that shape whether and how people move into or away from identity categories. For example, by paying attention to Brevard's sense of bodily-affective alignment, I am interested in understanding how she shifts the stakes of sexed, somatic change away from the troubled inheritances of sexological discourses and towards different interpretations. Her description of her transition as a better connection between emotional and physical pieces is about affect in terms of the materiality of embodiment, not a shifting of position in the lines connecting gender, sex, and sexuality. In addition, other authors who transition in order to feel happier, like Hale, change their bodies not because of questions invoking identity categories, "What am I?", but because of desires shaped by affect, "What changes do I need to make to become a happier person?" And those who focus on the self as well as those concerned with the metaphysics of transitioning defy easy categorization; reading them, I am drawn to the ways they rework the connections between matter and meaning, self and soul through transitions motivated by feelings. Even the authors most focused on social legibility, while more overtly intent on the categories man, woman, transsexual, transgender, are

moved through feeling; I read their ways of forming themselves as driven by affect in addition to, or as part of, identity. In this sense, my reading for and paying attention to various formations of trans affect promises understandings rooted not in the categories of sexed embodiment, but rather in the feelings of embodiment as they come into and out of fixed relationships with sex and gender. These writers move me away from knowledge rooted in the binarized categories of man/woman, female-bodied and male-bodies, sex and gender, towards a different understanding of experiencing and being trans based in feelings.

In order to explicate the way that *with* becomes possible through reading for disparate forms of trans affect, I now turn to the specific mode of attention I invoked at the beginning of this section that “thinking and feeling with” trans texts requires. Importantly, this mode of attention brings my invocations of response and responsibility in remembering lost others from chapter one together with the kinds of understandings I hope to glean from trans affect. Reading for affect in general and the connections in “trans affect” in particular is about paying attention to movements that happen both within and outside of common frameworks for understanding transgender and transsexual experiences. This kind of attention requires a specific distance, not necessarily the intimate space that I write through as a person also going through transition, but a proximity that gets one close enough to sense the movement-made-flesh that different iterations of “trans affect” engenders. This kind of proximity is a form of response, for sensitivity to this movement means that one must be open to feeling the brush of another’s passage, the touch of his/her/hir affect, when reading and seeking

understanding. And taking up this response in order to get at a form of responsible understanding, making it a practice of “thinking and feeling with,” means allowing oneself to be open to the touch of an other, yes, but especially a touch that transforms.

In the following three chapters, I take up specific doings of trans affect in order to closely examine the metaphors and particularities of distinct junctions of trans and affect. While different in the ways they connect the doing and being of trans with affect, these writings have in common a particular reach, for they make the space of reading one of active encounter. For instance, Aleshia Brevard, whose memoir is the focus of the next chapter, tells a story that becomes increasingly intimate as her writing parallels her practice of coping with fear, anxiety, and a fairly hostile world. Early in her book, she describes meetings with other then-queens in the safety of semi-hidden bars, moments in which “tilts with the ‘established daytime order’ were recounted ... with great glee” (45).

For Brevard, this practice revealed how “the outside world could hurt, humiliate, and momentarily humble us, but a sense of humor saw us through a lot of pain” (46).

Brevard’s sense of humor leavens her entire autobiography, infusing the brutalities and humiliations she recounts with a wry tone that engages the reader, that makes of the space of reading a warm invitation into her own trans affect. Leslie Feinberg’s writing in *Stone Butch Blues*, the subject of the fourth chapter, is similarly interested in luring the reader into her account; the novel begins with a letter written in the second person and continues with an account in which the protagonist’s emotions are apparent only to the reader through the landscape of the novel itself. In this sense, Feinberg pushes her reader to respond to the feelings that happen in the novel, because the novel’s structure

makes it so that only the reader can accurately witness them. And the text that focuses my fifth chapter, Susan Stryker's "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," through its use of second-person address and its demand that readers suture together a unique mixture of poetry, prose, and theory in order to understand it, crafts a space of reading that touches and demands, that lures and sticks, inviting and provoking its readers to be moved by Stryker's "transgender rage." The alluring touch of these texts, the way their specific navigations of "trans affect" move, prod, poke, and invite, makes them ideal for my own thinking through what kinds of changes, writ large, thinking and feeling with specific trans affects might bring about. In the remainder of the dissertation, I read them using literary theories, writings on emotions, and feminist science studies in order to articulate how their metaphors and language encourage understandings of transgender embodiment that not only promote "thinking and feeling with," but also engender new and urgent ways to read the connections among embodiment, affect, and knowledge production.

Chapter Three:

Affect, Ontology, and Friction:

Reading with Aleshia Brevard's *The Woman I Was Not Born to Be*

Introduction

This chapter examines Aleshia Brevard's memoir, *The Woman I Was Not Born to Be*, reading in her writing an alluring sense of the ways that feeling shapes the doing and being of gender. Drawing from William James and Isabelle Stengers, I find in Brevard's narrative a form of affective friction that helps to craft the woman Brevard becomes. By shaping Brevard's emergent sense of "woman," this friction expands my understanding and use of "thinking and feeling with," for it pushes me to rethink the relationships among gender, feeling, narrative, and embodiment. Structured in a piecemeal fashion, Brevard's narrative also pulls her reader in by pushing him/her/hir to make sense of its temporality. This chapter takes up this structure and affective friction in order to think through how Brevard's "trans affect" not only shapes her experience of embodiment but also prompts her readers towards different understandings of both trans and woman.

Aleshia Brevard and the *Woman [She] Was Not Born To Be*

My life began in Los Angeles, at Westlake Clinic, in 1962. – Aleshia Brevard

Aleshia Brevard's autobiography, *The Woman I Was Not Born to Be*, presents a story of becoming a woman that is also an undoing. Beginning with a temporally disjointed description, her narrative weaves the bodily experience of her “gender transition surgery” through a multitude of memories that pre-date her entry into the Westlake Clinic;⁴⁶ this telling, also a suturing, spans the first four chapters of the book. The remainder of Brevard's story, told in a linear fashion, explores Brevard's “woman reborn,” an emergent womanhood shaped by multiple shifts in her understanding of “woman” (81). Brevard crafts an emergent self through this structure, one that she unravels and reshapes through the remainder of her story. Affect textures both her experiences and her embodiment.

Brevard opens her memoir by linking difference and pain, beginning with “Mother never said I was not different” and continuing by describing how her mother “knew I was not like other boys and realized the suffering that dissimilarity caused me.” In an effort “to stem the flood of ... youthful tears,” Brevard's mother tells her, “if everyone were the same, ... what a boring world it would be.” Unconsoled, Brevard's young self thinks, “nothing could possibly be better than being like everyone else!” This description closes abruptly as Brevard thrusts the reader into a temporally distant present: “my reverie was broken as the nurse suddenly strode into my hospital room” (1).

Brevard's initial narrative alternates difference joined with pain and an anticipated comfortable sameness, exemplified in a desire for a future in which Brevard

⁴⁶ See “Interview: Aleshia Brevard with Mary Weaver” by Brevard and Weaver.

might become “like everyone else” (1). As illustrated by the broken reverie, the narrative’s temporality shifts in tandem with these affective changes. Indeed, throughout the initial chapters of her memoir, Brevard’s writing moves frequently from an almost-present past-tense, “my eyes were beginning to get very heavy” (8), to a geographically and often temporally distant past tense, such as her account of how, “by the age of twenty, I had become a drag queen” (4). Initially fast-paced, the temporal shifts gradually allocate more time to reflection, occasionally interrupted by the increasingly hazy recent present of the surgery. Brevard positions this anachronistic telling as happening in a “suspended state of being,” a space in which her reflections knit together in harmony with the crafting of a new body (9).

Proceeding in “in *no* linear fashion,” the early “suspended” chapters of Brevard’s memoir place temporally and emotionally disjointed experiences side by side, a method of narration that alters the feel of those experiences (emphasis original 30). By recounting her first real love, her realization of the pleasure and power of being perceived as sexually attractive, and her experiences of social ostracism and bodily harm in swift succession, Brevard situates moments of radically different affective texture—the rough discomfort of not fitting in and the smooth pleasure of being desired—in narrative (if not chronological) continuity. This placement blunts the edges of difference-marked discomfort, leveling the moments and making the difference between them chafe less. Importantly, this smoothing through weaving also helps her to craft a seemingly cohesive self.

Describing how while “in the operating arena, doctors were busily stitching away to create me a vagina; inside my head, my psyche was doing a little patchwork of its own,” Brevard points to how her narrative knits her body and self (26). Indeed, her “patchwork,” part of an effort to align her “emotional and physical pieces” (30) by using writing to smoothly stitch together jarring experiences of difference, creates an emergent and seemingly whole self, a “reborn woman” (81) unmarked by the rough seams of discomfort and difference.⁴⁷ Frankenstein-like, Brevard’s first chapters animate a self whose smooth edges will fit easily into the bodily sameness of a post-surgical life, one ready for a life textured by the comfort of sameness rather than the pain of difference.

However, Brevard’s creation is short-lived. Indeed, her title, *The Woman I Was Not Born to Be*, plays on this problem; while it gestures towards the book’s status as a transsexual memoir, it also signifies that Brevard’s second, surgical and narrative “birth” as a “woman reborn” does not engender the woman that Brevard intended to become. Brevard’s initial narrative weaving crafts a self that quickly comes undone in the face of a world that demands a kind of being-woman Brevard neither anticipated nor fully understood in advance. This unraveling, which begins in the fifth chapter with the long-sought milestone of a post-surgery body and a shift into a linear narrative, highlights a central theme of Brevard’s writing: the constant undoing and redoing of the connection between “woman” and “to be.”

“Alfred, Adieu” begins with a groggy, post-surgery revelation:

⁴⁷ In this sense, Brevard’s writing strongly echoes Jay Prosser’s contention that “the resexing of the transsexual body is made possible through narrativization, the transitions of sex enabled by those of narrative” (*Second Skins* 5).

My life began at Westlake Clinic on that day in 1962. Gone was my “birth defect.” From this day forward I could react to life emotionally, pursue my own feminine dreams of success, and live as an equal partner with the man I loved. I had been reborn woman. I was free.

That I believed to be true. (81)

Brevard follows this ominous sentence by pointing out how this sense of freedom reflected her “skewed perception of a woman’s status in America.” Her happy anticipation that “as a female [she] would be instantly creditable, acceptable, and understood” (81), turns to a sense of dismay and even discomfort as she discovers that “after the transformation, [she] still [has] emotional and psychological work to do.” Noting that “surgery did not make me a secure woman,” Brevard realizes “it merely opened the door for me to become one” (83). This revelation initiates the undoing and re-crafting of Brevard’s emergent self, and she leaves home for “Chicago and points west” in order to “learn what it mean[s] to be a woman” and begin the labor of self-fashioning anew (108).⁴⁸

Brevard’s narrative change from a temporally disjointed telling to a linear story enables the kind of unraveling that her nascent self undergoes throughout the remainder of her book. No longer figured through a “suspended state of being,” her story details her increasing understanding of the kind of social positioning being female entails, including her initial shock at discovering that, in becoming a woman, she has “been

⁴⁸ Brevard’s description departs from readings like those of Prosser, who writes of the importance of coming home to one’s body through the journey (often involving international travel) to surgery, for her process of finding herself begins rather than ends with the supposed homecoming to her newly sexed body. See Prosser’s “Exceptional Locations: Transsexual Travelogues” for more of his discussion.

socially demoted” to “second-class” citizenship (109).⁴⁹ This surprise couples with Brevard’s self-ascribed lagging behind the contemporary women’s movement in her continued attempts “to comprehend the traditional female role” (158). Throughout the rest of her narrative, Brevard moves into and out of these kinds of understandings of her social role, gradually coming to reconcile growing self-confidence and self-acceptance with an increasingly complex understanding of “woman.” The linear structure of her narrative layers these understandings, demonstrating how each new one undoes its predecessor and positioning each understanding as successive. In this sense, the structure of Brevard’s post-surgery writing facilitates her continued unraveling and re-working of the connection between gender and ontology, “woman” and “to be.” An early encounter with discomfort illustrates this process.

Having made her way back to California, “with no male attachments – not even [her] own,” Brevard spreads her “fledgling female wings” (109). Describing a stop at a “quaint French café and bar,” she writes:

It looked like a place where I might feel at ease in the presence of heterosexual society, but I was not comfortable entering a straight bar without the protection of a male escort. I was always afraid someone would approach me and loudly announce, “We do not allow your kind here.” It had never actually happened, but that didn’t diminish my fear that it could. I knew I had to overcome such anxiety, or I’d be home alone for a *long* time. (emphasis original 111)

After a couple drinks, Brevard begins to unwind. “One well-dressed businessman noticed my sudden joie de vivre and sent me a drink. I was a novice nymph, but I

⁴⁹ Brevard brackets this shock with the caution that “male-to-female transsexuals should never attempt to drag male privilege in to their new lives” (109).

understood such courtly attentions. Women earned less money than their male counterparts – because men were expected to spend money on us!” (111).

However, her story soon darkens. After accepting a ride home from the businessman, Brevard’s happiness quickly turns to fear. She writes:

I stepped into the stranger’s car to find myself center stage in the Jekyll and Hyde Show. As a young boy, and later as a drag queen, I accepted violent sexual aggression as a sissy’s due. Men attacked me because I looked female but was not quite a woman. Things were now supposed to be different. They were not. (111)

A struggle ensues. Brevard’s attacker is indifferent to her forceful “No!” because he reads her “as a lady,” someone whose “No!” means that she is “open to negotiation.” Bewildered, Brevard laments: “if there were rules for a woman to follow in this situation, I had not learned them at my mother’s knee” (111).

Throughout the incident, Brevard describes how she thought she’d “been too friendly, sent incorrect messages, given him the wrong idea,” blaming herself for the attack. This line of thinking culminates in an attempt to persuade her attacker that she simply fears sexual intimacy and that he shouldn’t think anything is wrong with him. Eventually, Brevard escapes his car for the safety of her friend’s apartment. Her relief is short-lived, however, as “a loud pounding on the door,” alerts her to the presence of “Pasadena’s finest” standing on her doorstep. “It was not a philanthropic call,” for “the disillusioned gentleman had filed a complaint saying a ‘man in women’s clothing’ had tried to seduce him” (112).

Neither my word, my Social Security card, nor my driver's license would suffice as proof of my identity. The police wanted more. They had a hot tip. I might be of questionable gender, and these boys wanted to see irrefutable proof.

A policewoman was called to the scene of the crime. She, at least, apologized for what she was about to do.

In tears, I submitted to a strip search.

I passed her inspection with high marks. Without a word, the disgruntled policemen stomped off in search of other desperados.
(112-113)

The pain and discomfort, the bodily harm of a life as not quite a woman, rather than dissipating through the acquisition of inspection-passing genitalia, remains the same.⁵⁰ Brevard's bodily move from a gay subculture, "where humiliation at the hands of the police was expected" (113), and in which violence at the hands of straight men was the norm, to a police-verified, legibly female body, had not substantially altered her experience of pain linked to difference: "Things were now supposed to be different. They were not" (111).

The connection Brevard draws between pain and difference here is not the same as its earlier invocation, for she passes as not-male in her passing inspection. But her experience is traumatic nonetheless, for she comes to realize that those legible as women as well as those who are read as "not quite" women can suffer in similar ways. The sameness of Brevard's newly born femininity –apparent in both the "gentleman's" reading of Brevard as a lady and therefore as someone whose "No!" means "open to

⁵⁰ It is notable that this inspection is conducted by a police woman, not a police man, an implicit indication that Brevard's femininity is recognized by those involved even as it is contested. And while the police woman's apology to Brevard underscores how this question of legibility involves no small degree of shame for Brevard, it does not ameliorate the fact that the inspection was requested in the first place.

negotiation,” as well as in the policewoman’s gaze – comes to be “not different” in terms of Brevard’s affective experience, and her experience of being a woman disappointingly echoes her suffering as “not quite a woman” (111). Brevard continues to experience pain and discomfort, and the sameness of her body yields a constancy in her emotional life that her re-crafting of self had attempted to disrupt.

The contrast between this moment of inspection, in which Brevard’s experience is disappointingly “not different,” and the other moment of inspection I outline in my first chapter, in which her manager at a burlesque revue affirms her femininity on the basis of the sameness of her “twat,” merits exploration. Indeed, the fact that there is a contrast marks a change in Brevard’s relationship to being woman, but in a manner that diverges from my reading thus far. Here I turn to the question of affect.

Ontologies of Feeling and Experience

We feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble. – William James

Affect as both emotion and bodily feeling, a texturing of experience, surfaces through and shapes much of my reading above. Joy, pain, hope, disappointment, and the urgency of bodily movement, inform and suffuse Brevard’s narrative, shaping both her emergent self and the unraveling and re-crafting of that self. The fact that Brevard undertakes a journey to “points west” to become the woman she was “not born to be” underscores the importance of movement in her writing. The question of what allows

and makes possible that movement –into a new place and a new sense of woman— forms the central inquiry of this portion of the chapter. Drawing from the work of William James, I examine the ontology of affect, and the manner in which affect inflects Brevard’s being a woman. This conjunction of affect and ontology shapes my understanding of moments in which Brevard describes “overtaken” by “something extraordinary” (178).

William James’s radical empiricism produces an account of the self that disarticulates a number of norms and binarisms. Arguing that James gives us “a radically new account of how the self penetrates and is penetrated by the world,” philosopher John Smith emphasizes how James reveals a sense of a self as *of* the world (291). This relationship with the world hinges on a sense of the self as crafted by experience, one whose having of experience is also a being had by experience. As I emphasize in my introduction, for James, experience becomes what it is through affect, defined as bodily sensations and feelings. Through this sense of experience as feeling, or affect, James provides not only a startling account of a self in and of the world, but an ontology of that self rooted in affect.

For James, the physicality of perception is emotion; a body affected is a body in a state of feeling. He writes that anger, love, and fear are “affections of the body” and the mind. Thus “we can say that we are aware of a painful place, filling a certain bigness in our organism, or we can say that we are inwardly in a ‘state’ of pain,” for the felt and the thought are not easily separated in such instances (273). The travel of descriptors also applies to moments of appreciation, as “experiences of painful objects, for example, are

usually also painful experiences; perceptions of loveliness, of ugliness, tend to pass muster as lovely or ugly perceptions,” leading James to assert that “sometimes the adjective wanders as if uncertain where to fix itself” (182). The wandering adjective, lodging sometimes on the side of the thing described, such as the beautiful flower, sometimes in our experience of the thing, such as the beautiful feeling, reveals how bodily perception and feeling are undivided for James. This indistinctness, in which feelings *about* and sensations *of* something commingle, marks the ways experiences of things are sensual relations with them in James’s thinking. Reading James, one can articulate how reality and one’s perceptions of it are mediated through affect such that the process of relating in and through a multitudinous reality is always already sensual and sensible. Following this logic, we can sense how the stuff of the world gains its texture and color through our sensations, which are our relations with it. Our feeling is an act of being.

Affect fuels Brevard’s journey, for her narrative, her body, and even her experiences of geography are shaped by the desire for a more comfortable, less painful experience of life as a woman. In this sense, if we read her affective experiences through James, we can see that her story is deeply ontological. And while I have noted the ontological dimension of her title —she becomes the woman she “was not born to be”— its affective dimension surfaces in the subtitle: “A Transsexual Journey.” I read in this word choice a deliberate emphasis on movement, travel, passage, which I see reflected in Brevard’s bodily and emotional changes, in her experiences of affect throughout the book. Many of these affective experiences are oriented towards more comfortable

sensations of acceptance, love, and understanding. However, there are other affects driving her narrative that also merit examination.

Brevard consistently emphasizes the role of an “instinct for survival” in shaping her life (127). She describes it as a less-than-conscious sensation:

In moments of great danger, something extraordinary overtakes me. I become chameleon-like. A self-protection mechanism is triggered, causing insignificant gestures, movements, and objects to become crystalline images. In short, I subconsciously start searching for something that will save my precious ass. (178)

The “something extraordinary” that overtakes Brevard, her survival instinct, is born of her younger days, when daily experience in the “half-world between male and female” on the streets of San Francisco’s “gay ghetto,” the Tenderloin, made her understand that “living on the fringe of society demands constant vigilance.” Writing that the lessons she and her friend, Kathy, née Stormy, “learned in the Tenderloin would remain with us for the rest of our lives,” Brevard links those lessons to safety, noting, “on the streets, awareness can save your life when violence suddenly erupts around you –or is directed at you” (127). Awareness, vigilance, and a well-honed instinct for self-protection act, together, as the “something extraordinary” that guides Brevard through a number of perilous moments in her post-surgery life.⁵¹ That this “something extraordinary”

⁵¹ Importantly, at the close of her story, Brevard remarks on another technique for survival relevant to this reading. She writes: “Every transsexual I knew in those early years faced life with a determined smile on her lips,” for “we’d learned to mask our anguish with a laugh and a quick quip.” This leads her to assert that “being entertaining at all cost, making light of one’s bruises, is a familiar technique for survival,” for, if you “turn torment into laughter, ... you have a defense” (241). This technique is notably

“overtakes” Brevard, usurping volition and shaping her bodily movements, reveals another dimension of affect in her narrative.

While Brevard details numerous incidents in which her survival hinges on an instinctual sense of moving through the world, one that stands out is a moment that occurs not long after her inspection in Reno at the burlesque venue (detailed in my first chapter). The incident occurs when Brevard is confronted by hecklers while she performs on stage. She attempts to quell them by with witty quips, an effort to charm as well as silence. Moments after delivering her final zinger to the group’s ringleader, “Mister, I’d tell you to shut your mouth, but I wouldn’t want to ruin your sex life,” she finishes her act and leaves the stage for the lounge (126). Once inside, she is approached by one of the hecklers, who invites her to join them at their table.

I had to drink with the customers somewhere, so I agreed. As we reached the table, he pushed me roughly into the chair. Once I was pinned between him and the table, he started a stream of foul and abusive language. I tried to get up. He pushed me back down and grabbed my breast. I kicked him. Hard. He backed away. Now, with just enough room to get out of the chair, I sprang to my feet and followed through with a solid, resounding wallop across his face. (126)

Immediately thereafter, “bouncers materialized from every section of the club.”

Somewhat ruefully, Brevard then notes: “I was fired on the spot. Having passed the manager’s vaginal inspection, she expected a woman to know better than to cold-cock a paying customer” (126).

similar to feminized survival tactics employed by cisgendered women in patriarchal cultures.

In the heat of the moment, Brevard does not pause and reflect in order to think through the consequences of her actions, but rather acts instantly in a manner grounded entirely in her need for self-preservation. The “something extraordinary” that guides her is swift bodily movement rather than thought-out action, for her motions are dictated by an urge for bodily rather than fiscal preservation. Notably, Brevard’s swift movement also bespeaks a kinetic energy born of earlier experience of life not as a woman, for her bodily motion derives, in part, from not having been conditioned into femininity from a young age (something she bemoans in other moments). Thus, one might call Brevard’s swift actions to ensure her safety, unthinking, or even not thinking as a “woman.”

However, William James might direct us to read her actions in this moment as evidence of the indistinctness of thought, emotion, and body affected while in the thick of an experience. He writes:

The instant field of the present is always experience in its “pure” state, plain unqualified actuality, a simple *that*, as yet undifferentiated into thing and thought, and only virtually classifiable as objective fact or some one’s opinion about fact. (emphasis original 208)

Instant, “pure” experience precedes sorting into emotion, affect, and thought, it simply *is*, an undifferentiated sensuality. Pure experiences come upon us unbounded; what we feel in the moment may later be differentiated into multiple moments and multiple feelings, but in the flush of it, we are submerged and we *are* the stuff of experience. Further, the boundaries between pure experiences are indistinct; James asserts that “the concrete pulses of our experience appear pent in by no ... definite limits, ... they run into one another continuously and seem to interpenetrate,” for “what in them is relation and

what is matter related is hard to discern” (294). Sorting into subject and object, self and other, fact and feeling, comes later.

Brevard’s cold-cocking of a paying customer can be read as a moment of immediate, pure experience in which the boundary between self and other hardens. A quick movement towards the man, her wallop establishes and hardens the distance between them. This bodily movement, the motion of her body-affected, shapes the border between self and other, and, in the process, shapes her self. Indeed Brevard’s movement hardens her self by firming of the boundary between the two of them and making her firm rather than pliant. This affective texturing shifts her sense of self, revealing how pure experiences in the sense James describes them help to shape and reshape the ways Brevard experiences being woman.

My reading of the moment of Brevard’s wallop as a pure experience does not contradict my earlier assertion, that Brevard’s becoming woman is a continual undoing/redoin of layered successive understandings. The past of her being woman does figure into this pure present. Indeed, James’s understanding of the role of the past in the present speaks to this point:

Experience as a whole is a process in time, whereby innumerable particular terms lapse and are superseded by others that follow upon them by transitions which, whether disjunctive or conjunctive in content, are themselves experiences, and must in general be accounted at least as real as the terms which they relate. (203)

The skeins connecting temporally disparate experiences are themselves experiences in this account, and their “stuff” must be understood to be as real as the experiences

themselves. Taking up the moment in which Brevard is fired, we can see that while her doing of woman is found wanting – witness her manager’s sense that, as a woman, she should know better than to hit a paying customer – her legibility as female remains unquestioned. In this sense, the reshaping of her being woman that happens in the moment of her being fired falls into what James might refer to as “conjunctive” experience. While Brevard no doubt experiences negative affects about job loss in the thick of this moment, the fact that her manager questions what *kind* of woman she is (rather than whether she is a woman at all) becoming implicitly affirms Brevard’s earlier joy, described in chapter two, at having a twat that mirrors millions. In this sense, her past feelings of affirmation as a woman conjoin with the present of her being fired. To take this reading further, the disjunctive element of Brevard’s “pure” experience of this moment lies in this question of the kind of woman Brevard is becoming, for it is clear that her bodily and emotional hardening, in addition to her increasing self-respect, are a far cry from the “excessively submissive nature” she initially hoped to be rewarded in becoming a “woman reborn” (81). While conjunctive experiences play a role in Brevard’s doing/redoing of woman, disjunctive ones are also critical to her process of becoming woman, for they speak to an important element of Brevard’s ontological change throughout her narrative.

Texture, Disjuncture, and Change

The disjunction I read above is affective. Following Grossberg's sense of the ways that affect gives tone, texture, and color to the lived (81), my reading of Brevard's wallop as a something that hardens her contrasts with her earlier descriptions of emotional fragility and an all-consuming orientation towards men. Brevard's sense of herself immediately post-surgery underscores this contrast. Noting how in the early 1960s, most American women were caught up in "the archaic myth that without a man, a woman is worthless," she describes how "few women had found their stronger voice—and so I was trying to soften mine" (81). Through her wallop, Brevard transitions out of this early softness and moves away from an all-consuming orientation towards men, disjoining the woman she is becoming from the one she thought she wanted to be. Importantly, this affective disjuncture builds on an earlier one in which the question of whether Brevard was a woman at all was at stake.

There are two key moments of inspection in Brevard's memoir. The first, at the hands of the Pasadena police, yields a disappointing sameness in her emotional experience, for her tears and shame are not markedly different from the feelings she experienced as part of a gay subculture in which being subject to police violence was the norm (113). The second occurs when the manager of the burlesque venue in which Brevard works demands a "look-see" in response to allegations of Brevard's possibly being not-female. While I discussed this incident in my first chapter, I return to it now because of its contrast with this earlier inspection. When Brevard's manager proclaims "looks like a *twat* to me, ... and I've seen a million of 'em!" and Brevard notes, "that was the end of that, I should have offered her a cigar," Brevard experiences a different kind

of affect than that of her earlier inspection. Like her first inspection, this one begins with fearful anticipation about potentially experiencing shame and humiliation, but unlike the first, it ends in entirely new feelings: joy and happiness.

This change in Brevard's emotional experience points to a form of emergence. We can see this in the cigar, of course, given the tradition of proffering cigars after the birth of a child. Indeed, the fact that this practice is typically specific to male children reveals a jarring appropriation of a gendered cultural practice. However, this emergence is also affective, coming out of the disjunction between Brevard's feelings from her past inspection and the new sensations that accompany this one. While Brevard's earlier police inspection is thickened with sensations of remembered and familiar discomforts, yielding a sense of self and woman as disappointing in their similarity to the past, her second examination produces completely distinct feelings. In the moment of pure experience of her second inspection, past and present feelings disjoin such that new affects come to shape who Brevard is and what kind of woman she becomes. Affective in nature, this emergence comes about through friction between Brevard's past and present experiences and understandings of woman. In order to explore this sense of friction and its relationship to engendering new concepts, I turn to the work of Isabelle Stengers as she reads Alfred North Whitehead.

Friction, Abstraction and Emergence

Abstract propositions are asking for, and prompting to, a "leap of the imagination"; they act as a lure for feeling, for feeling "something that matters." – Isabelle Stengers

Stengers takes up Whitehead's *Process and Reality* in order to think through his incitement for philosophy to engineer "new, relevant abstractions." For Stengers, new abstractions transform the way we perceive, prompting a "leap of the imagination" (16), a "primary glimmering of consciousness [which] reveals *something that matters*" (emphasis original 3). Productions of an "empirically felt variation of the way our experience matters" (3), new abstractions come out of even the most banal of our experiences; their importance lies in the way they change the framework through which we interpret them. New abstractions do not necessarily challenge adequacy to a pre-established matter of fact, but rather suggest that adequacy itself is a trap, that there might be emergences masked in stable facts (2). Thus, the forest I walk through is still filled with leaves that are factually described green, and my sense of a new abstraction as a guide to my thoughts does not challenge this, but how I experience these leaves changes, such that their greenness might not be the most important quality I notice in them. Similarly, if we look to engineer a new abstraction regarding sexed bodies, we might think of the adequately factual statement, "that body is female," wherein "female" registers as the abstraction denoting the concrete experience of embodiment. However, bodies that seem female anatomically but not chromosomally, bodies that look female but *feel* male or simply not-female, like those described by some transgender writers and artists, belie the adequacy of "that body is female" and push us to better address felt discrepancies and biological variations in our descriptions. This is the work of new abstractions.

Importantly, new abstractions lure us into different understandings of materiality (4). Stengers describes how Whitehead's own push for new abstractions centers in the problem of what she calls the "bifurcation of nature," a nature divided into the material, allied with science, and experience, allied with sensation. This division juxtaposes "molecular mechanisms explaining the function of neurons," and "a perceived nature full of sounds, odours, enjoyments and values" (Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* 54). In contrast, new abstractions entice us away from this divided nature in order to better address the intersection of what we experience (enjoyment of a scent) and the material (the rose); they act "as a lure for feeling, for feeling 'something that matters'" (3).⁵² This new sense of materiality is tied into what Whitehead terms "coherence."

"Coherence means the demand that we become able to interpret together, without opposition, hierarchy, or disconnection, what we usually describe in mutually contradicting terms," such as "mind and matter," "cause and reason," and "fiction and reality," writes Stengers (8). For Stengers, the demand for coherence engenders a "new, nonconformal occasional mode of becoming," crossing feeling and being in such a way as to disarticulate settled oppositions (13). We can see this sense of coherence in Brevard's continual doing/undoing of woman, for the way affect shapes the woman she becomes prompts us to understand her through the register of feeling rather than the binaries of hetero/homo, male/female, and inner/outer. In this sense, while her narrative does not discard these binaries, her movement through affect works through them in a way that shifts what they mean, pushing us to come to new understandings of

⁵² This sense of mattering, for Stengers, is a "matter of concern" (Latour 2004).

what “being woman,” or being a woman, actually mean. The touch, or feel, of Brevard’s writing lures in the manner of a new abstraction. Friction is central to this process.

For Stengers, friction produces new abstractions. She notes: “the kind of achievement Whitehead aimed at could be described ... as a maximization of friction, recovering what has been obscured by specialized selection” (7). To elaborate her point, Stengers describes Galileo’s experiments with carefully polished and smoothed balls and an incline plane, in which “the whole polishing and smoothing experimental activity had for its aim that the autobiography of the rolling down ball would tell nothing about the ball as such in order for the speed it gains to reliably testify for what we now call terrestrial attraction” (7). The movement of the denuded friction-minimized balls foregrounds the work of a particular abstraction: gravity. In this instance, were friction present, it would shift the balls’ testimonies and foreground their own histories (the acquisition of this bump or that notch), revealing what had been occluded through the focus on gravity. This sense of friction produces multiple logics that confuse and interfere with singular abstractions like gravity. And, for Stengers, it is this sort of friction that shifts the production of abstractions and makes new abstractions possible.

Friction changes our understandings by shifting our abstractions away from settled distinctions. The production of abstractions such as gravity come about through what Stengers terms “specialized selection”; these abstractions are the distinctions that fall into easy divisions, such as the pairs of “mind and matter” and “nature and culture.” By obscuring these settled distinctions and doing away with specialized selection, friction can produce new modes of understanding and push us to pay attention to variations that

lie neither within nor outside of more normative either/or pairings. Stengers's sense of friction gives me a way to think through the shift between Brevard's two moments of inspection, for the sense of newness I locate in her change in affective experience marks a move away from the "specialized selection" of feeling the familiar discomfort of marginalization into something else.

The disjunction I read between Brevard's experiences of inspection lies in a marked change in the relationship between past and present affective textures. Reading with Stengers, one can see this disjunction as a moment of affective friction, one that produces for Brevard a new form of being and a new understanding of woman. Instead of continuing her experience of a life made safe by passing, framed through the norms of gender and heterosexuality, the abrupt shift in the feel of Brevard's experience makes it so the rough affects of her past chafe against the smoothness of her present, engendering friction. This friction occludes the specialized selections of male/female, hetero/homo, and trans/cisgender by pointing to a new understanding enabled by different feelings and emergent affects. This friction begins a new understanding of woman for Brevard, such that, rather than worry about whether she will have problems being read as female, or whether her life as a woman will be "not different" from her life before, Brevard instead begins to explore what *kind* of woman she might become. This exploration pushes her away from focusing on the settled distinctions that had defined her pre- and immediately post-transition life. Indeed, immediately after this inspection, Brevard embraces life as a performer, the beginning of her path to becoming a full-fledged actress, the career that ultimately gives her purpose and enables her to grow into

a new, if still changing, sense of woman. In this way, the friction of Brevard's experience points to "something that matters," something different, a new shaping that belies the adequacy of normal and normative descriptions.

A later encounter with police underscores this emergence. Brevard and friends are swimming nude in a pool, and the police arrive prepared to cite them. However, this moment is fun-filled rather than fear-filled; the cops laugh and joke "with the pool full of naked women" and then head on their way, leading Brevard to note: "when 'questionable gender' is not an issue, nudity can be a very minor offense" (133). This incident reveals how Brevard's lack of fear of being read as not-female, inaugurated in the moment that christened her twat among millions, circulates through later fearful moments, a promise that emboldens her to feel no longer in question gender-wise and that cements her growing identity as a specific kind of woman: her own.

However, Brevard's continual reshaping of woman does not permit her reader to settle into an easy understanding of what that woman is; the moment of emergence I read above enables multiple new and different disjunctions in between the kind of woman Brevard is from one moment to the next throughout the remainder of her story. Her descriptions of life as a wife, lover, and actress evidence continued changes in the affective texture (and orientation) of her life as a woman through to her journey's nominal end, when, "even without a partner" (241), as a woman who is no longer defined by a desire for stability and the wish to be like everyone else, Brevard closes her narrative. In this sense, Brevard's becoming woman, while enabled by the emergence of the second inspection that I note, happens through a continual shift to new textures,

new understandings, to a new sense of being woman throughout the body of her narrative. The allure of her writing, rooted in the affective frictions of these changing textures, compels a different and sensual understanding of her experience, one which, in turn, changes the way normative, settled distinctions describe her passage into womanhood. Her sense of woman and her sense of self, in the roughness of revisions that are disjunctures, constantly yield new and different understandings, “empirically felt variation[s],” producing an emergent self that defies the normative abstractions through which it is seemingly understood by others (Stengers 3). Brevard becomes the woman she was not born to be because the woman she becomes changes the very substance of the abstraction “woman.”

Chapter Four:

Friction in the Interstices: Affect and Landscape in *Stone Butch Blues*

The friction that makes Brevard's emergence and her reworking of the abstraction "woman" possible is a specific friction of disjuncture. In this chapter I articulate another kind of friction, one more directly in keeping with the reading proffered by physics: a force that resists the relative motion of two bodies or surfaces that come into contact. Focusing on Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, I examine the frictions engendered by affect, embodiment, and space (or lack thereof) in a larger social world. Through this reading I articulate a different kind of emergence than Brevard's, one that engenders a "productive discomfort" between bodies and social worlds.

Introduction

Widely seen as one of the first modern transgender novels, Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* is renowned for its evocative description of a life lived across and between genders. Rather than depicting the transition from one sex to another, the focus of many transsexual memoirs, the book narrates the indeterminate bodily path of its protagonist, Jess Goldberg, from living as a "he-she," to taking testosterone and "passing" (being read in social settings as a man), to deciding to live as neither female nor male. Many queer, transsexual, feminist, and transgender activists value the book for

its detailed account of the hardships experienced by a protagonist whose body never quite fits gender norms. However, the changes Jess undergoes in the course of the narrative can be read through another lens, for hir bodily experiences are also shaped by affect.

The novel's title highlights the role of feeling in the narrative, for while "stone butch" indicates a bodily state of indeterminate masculinity, it also points to the texture of Jess's emotional experience, a "stone" that hardens hir surface such that ze cannot speak hir "blues." Indeed, because the "blues" highlighted by the title do not enter directly into the novel's dialogue, they enter into Jess's story through another register: space. This chapter traces this emergence, exploring the ways Jess's emotions shape and are shaped by space throughout the course of the novel in order to map out a shifting geography of feelings. By analyzing Jess's experiences in this manner, I hope to develop a better understanding of who Jess becomes and the ways that hir identity emerges, one rooted in the ways ze finds and builds hir place —emotional, physical, bodily—in the world.

A number of writers have taken up themes of feeling, space, and structure in *Stone Butch Blues*. Ann Cvetockovich, reading Jess's character as a lesbian butch, focuses on the ways that public feelings —responses to homophobia—and private ones, such as those expressed in a belated letter to an ex-girlfriend —commingle in the novel as part of a larger archive of lesbian feeling (76-79). Cressida Heyes critiques the novel's embrace of freedom of gender expression for its neglect of the larger social structures, such as normative heterosexuality and white bourgeois patriarchy, that inform and shape the

kinds and legibilities of gender expressions available to Jess (54). And Jay Prosser takes up a critical passage in the novel in order to argue for a connection between Jess's embodiment and a key geographical element of the book: home.

Occurring after Jess has been on testosterone long enough to have developed numerous masculine secondary sex characteristics, the moment when ze decides to stop injecting hormones, and therefore stop passing, orients Prosser's reading:

I drew one cc of hormones into a syringe, lifted it above my naked thigh –and then paused. My arm felt restrained by an unseen hand. No matter how I tried I could not sink that needle into my quadriceps as I'd done hundreds of times before. I stood up and looked in the bathroom mirror. The depth of sadness in my eyes frightened me. I lathered my morning beard stubble, scraped it clean with a razor, and splashed cold water on my face. The stubble still felt rough. As much as I loved my beard as part of my body, I felt trapped behind it. What I saw reflected in the mirror was not a man, but I couldn't recognize the he-she. My face no longer revealed the contrasts of my gender....But who was I now –woman or man? ... That question could never be answered as long as those were the only choices; it could never be answered if it had to be asked. (221-222)

For Prosser, this moment exemplifies how Jess “makes the fantastic transformation, the intermediate space of crossing, her (*sic*) lived reality” (187).⁵³ Moments later, when Jess describes hir chest surgery as “a gift to myself, a coming home to my body,” Prosser reads into Jess's narrative trajectory a more geographic path; for Prosser, Jess's decision to stop taking hormones is a decision to make of hir bodily between-ness a place called home (224).⁵⁴

⁵³ To note, with hir voice permanently lowered and hir chest made flat through surgery, Jess cannot become easily legible as female again, and thus hir decision to stop hormones is a decision to be indeterminately gendered.

⁵⁴ It is important to note that, for Prosser, this moment in the novel signals a larger division between transgender and transsexual. Jess's coming home to a body that does

Difference, Home, and Liminality

Prosser's reading of the home of in-between is appealing in its recognition of the deep connections among Jess's sense of self, body, and place. After all, Jess ran away from hir family's home at a young age and continually feels estranged from a social world that punishes hir expressions of gender; this naming of hir body as home is significant.⁵⁵ However, Prosser's argument leads to another home-related question. Let us take up another body/home metaphor and say, "home is where the heart is." Where is Jess's heart? What does home mean in terms Jess's emotions? That Feinberg's

not pass, one that visibly lies on the border between male and female, for Prosser, "deontologizes sex and gender" (185), making them a cultural legibility rather than a bodily being. For Prosser, this choice is profoundly ontological, for he finds that "the 'doing' of gender [in the manner Jess 'does' gender] profoundly destabilizes the reality of an 'is'" in this moment. This argument enables Prosser's larger and more political point, that transgender and transsexual are distinct because transgender "does" gender without inhabiting it through "being" (185). Conversely, in Prosser's reading, for "the transsexual," "passing is becoming, a step toward home" that "aligns gender identity with social identity" (184). He argues that Jess "is 'herself' (*sic*) only after her experience with hormones and surgery has somatically transgendered her, but only before they have transsexed her" (187). There are many theorists who disagree with this argument, including Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle.

⁵⁵ The introduction to *Geographies of Sexualities* highlights the kind of home Jess flees, noting:

Home, for many people, is taken for granted as a place of comfort, a retreat from the world, a place to be oneself. For many lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans identified people, however, home can be uncomfortable and alienating, shaped by the assumptions of heterosexuality that are present in their social relations with parents, siblings, neighbors and others in and around the home. (3)

In addition to assumptions of heterosexuality, policing of gender identities and corresponding behaviors can also make home a space of violence, or a place that is decidedly not a refuge from violence meted out elsewhere, such as at schools. Jess's creation of home(s) thus marks a novel space, not a nostalgic one, for ze cannot *return* to home as a space of refuge, only build one.

narrative traffics in both metaphor and simile in reference to an often-bodily home is a given; there are multiple moments when Jess describes “coming home to [hir] body” (177, 224) through chest surgery. However, the similes and metaphors in the narrative also couple emotion and space, leading to the question: can one understand Jess’s bodily home through the narrative’s more literal homes? And do these literal homes give us insight into the relationship between Jess’s identity and hir emotions?

A short answer: Yes! The literal home Jess builds throughout the novel help hir express a growing acceptance of hir body and hir self. For example, late in the narrative, after having sanded the floors, furnished, and made comfortable a new apartment in New York City, Jess notes: “And then one day I looked around at my apartment and realized I’d made a home” (237). Another important moment occurs when Jess’s partner Ruth, a transwoman, paints on the ceiling of another New York apartment a twilit sky, making its interior reflect their shared experiences of bodily liminality (270). These moments, both occurring after Jess has stopped passing and deliberately chosen an indeterminate gender expression, illustrate how home becomes, towards the novel’s end, a space that both houses and reflects Jess’s body and identity. Jess’s building of literal homes is a way for hir to exteriorize hir growing comfort with a non-normative gender identity.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ These literal homes also harken other conceptualizations of home. As Ahmed notes in *Queer Phenomenology*, homes are also related to migration, to diasporic movements; “homes are effects of histories of arrival.” “Diasporic spaces do not simply begin to take shape with the arrival of migrant bodies; it is more that we only notice the arrival of those who appear ‘out of place’”(9) For Ahmed, the arrival of those who are ‘in place,’ who are already ‘home,’ tends to be forgotten. And Doreen Massey questions the

The way that making homes reveals Jess's emotions and identity speaks to the manner in which spaces in general shape and are shaped by Jess's emotional experiences throughout the book. For example, earlier in the narrative, when Jess is less comfortable, we can see this spatial sensibility in the moment immediately prior to his decision to stop taking hormones:

I took my time in the shower, trying to scrub away the grime of isolation with hot soapy water. Loneliness [from passing] had become an environment –the air I breathed, the spatial dimension in which I was trapped. I sat in a boat on a deathly calm sea, waiting for a breeze to fill my sails. (221)

Loneliness is the air breathed, the body and its environs, and those environs are Jess's body in this description. Ze sits in "a boat on a deathly calm sea," such that his sense of being, his "is," becomes that boat, that space alone. In this moment, Jess's sense of self comes through an imagined world that reflects his emotional experience as a self at sea. Not only is Jess part of the novel's metaphorical landscape in this passage, but also his emotions at this juncture of his life are expressed through that space. Moreover, this space is a "deathly calm sea," a quiet nature, or "nature-scape," a kind of space historically associated with freedom, one well outside the gender-normative cityscapes in which Jess has grown up.⁵⁷

conceptualization of home, noting that home has been crafted as "singular and bounded," but that homes, especially at "times of estrangement and alienation," are multiple in a way that enables new perspectives and new understandings of who we are (171).

⁵⁷ Of course, this imagined "natural" space as one of freedom hearkens a long history of not only settler and imperial colonialism, but also as a space overlaid "with sexual meanings; wilderness areas are highly heterosexualized –increasingly with the postwar

This sensibility also textures the connections Jess makes with others throughout the novel. For example, in the middle of the novel, while passing as a man, Jess describes a conversation with a new friend, Ben, which allows Jess to mirror his imagined nature-scape. The encounter begins with Ben's revelation that he spent two years in jail. Jess narrates:

Suddenly, something changed in Ben. His whole body settled into a stillness that frightened me, like the smooth surface of a lake before a storm. I felt the turbulence churning beneath his surface. Ben's hurt was presenting itself. I waited. Pain emerges at its own pace. I sat in silence, my heart pounding. Maybe this was just my imagination But when I looked at Ben I knew I wasn't wrong. The storm was closing in, and it was too late to run. (183)

Ben prevaricates for a moment before returning to prison's impact on him.

And then suddenly it was there, in his eyes, all of his shame I leaned closer to Ben. He looked me in the eyes. In silence, without words, his eyes told me what had happened to him in prison. I didn't look away. Instead, I let him see himself in my own mirror

"I never told anyone," Ben said, as though our conversation had been out loud. (184)

The silence of their conversation allows Jess to understand Ben's pain through an imagined landscape similar to the one brought up earlier, a lake of emotions upon which a brewing storm reveals stress and fear. Initially like a lake with an incipient storm, the immediacy of metaphor soon changes the description such that Ben's emotional experience is rendered in a manner that directly mirrors Jess's. These non-urban

rise of family camping –and urban nature spaces are organized by specific sexual ideals and practices" (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 5).

imagined spaces express what neither of them can say out loud. And the reflected glances that conclude the exchange convey a connection made in silence through a shared geography of feelings.

Feelings expressed in silence are also conveyed through a more localized and intimate texture in the novel. Prior to his beginning hormones, Jess describes coming home from an encounter with the police in which he was raped, feeling choked by fear, and finding a wordless solace with Theresa: “Since I had no words to bring the woman I loved so much, I gave her all my tenderness” (138). His body constricts such that his emotions come to be rendered through his actions – the thickness of his silence, the softness of his touch – and the texture of the narrative conveys that which, for Jess, cannot be said.⁵⁸

This exchange between Jess and Theresa illustrates how movements and touch, paired with silences and not-quite silences, like the novel’s spaces, help Jess not only express his feelings to other characters, but also sense their emotions. In his opening letter to Theresa, Jess describes Theresa’s response to his post-police-rape experience: “You gently rubbed the bloody places on my shirt and said, ‘I’ll never get these stains out.’” He hears this speech as “an oddly sweet way of saying, or not saying, what you were feeling ... sort of the way I shut down emotionally when I feel scared and hurt and

⁵⁸ After Jess’s birth on a stormy night, his mother tells the Diné women, neighbors who helped at the birth, to “Put the baby over there.” The book continues: “The words chilled the Indian women. My mother could see that. The story was retold many times as I was growing up, as though the frost that bearded those words could be melted away by repeating them in a humorous, ironic way” (14). The frost on the words, the chill of the women, renders through metaphorical language the narrator’s feeling about this memory.

helpless and say funny little things that seem so out of context” (10). Later in the narrative, Jess describes how these words touched hir, for at that time “indirect messages cut through [hir] fog much more clearly than direct ones” (136). The indirectness of her speech, combined with her gentle touch, allows Jess to better understand Theresa’s feelings.

The manner in which silences and half-silences, intimate textures, and imagined spaces convey feelings in the novel reveals how affect, in spite of its absence in dialogue, deeply shapes characters’ interactions in *Stone Butch Blues*. Further, the social relationships conveyed by these interactions speak to the centrality of feeling in building not just Jess’s life but also the novel’s larger social and spatial world. Here I turn to the work of Sara Ahmed, for her thinking on the relationship between emotion and bodily surface makes palpable the ways Jess’s and others’ emotional changes are also social transformations.

Emotions, Surfaces, and Discomfort

I am different. I will always be different. I will never be able to nestle my skin against the comfort of sameness. – Jess Goldberg

To say that feelings are crucial to the forming of surfaces and borders is to suggest that what ‘makes’ those borders also unmakes them. In other words, what separates us from others is also what connects us to others.
– Sara Ahmed

Sara Ahmed’s *Cultural Politics of Emotion* argues that bodies acquire surfaces through the sociality of emotion (8). For Ahmed, “emotions are not ‘in’ either the

individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they were objects” (10).⁵⁹ Arguing “it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others,” Ahmed connects emotions to the crafting of the boundary between self and world, reading this boundary as articulated through encounters rather than prior to them (10). Her emphasis on boundaries as well as her rendering of the feel of bodily surfaces, surfaces that come to divide self from world, augments my discussion of the connections Jess experiences between emotions and a self of her world. Ahmed’s reading of pain, an emotion of particular relevance to this article, reveals the role of texture in that process of surfacing.

“The affectivity of pain is crucial to the forming of the body as both material and lived entity” for Ahmed (24). She writes of pain “as an *‘external and internal perception’*,” a sensual experience through which “we come to have a sense of our skin as a bodily surface” (emphasis original 24).⁶⁰ Ahmed gives an example of stubbing her toe on a

⁵⁹ Ahmed refuses both what she terms the “inside-out” model of emotions, an assumption that “I have feelings, which *then* move outwards towards objects and others, and which might even return to me,” and the “outside-in” model, which would propose that, working from the example of the death of the former Princess Diana, “feelings of grief existed in the crowd, and only then got taken on by individuals” (9).

⁶⁰ To note, Ahmed refuses a direct connection between ontology and pain, arguing that “it is not pain ... and indeed sensation more broadly ... that causes the forming of the surface,” but instead, “it is through the flow of sensations and feelings that become conscious as pain and pleasure that different surfaces are established” (24). And directly addressing the question of ontology in a footnote, Ahmed argues “pain ... cannot be separated from the attribution of value to objects, but ... the value of objects is not determined by sensation ... so whilst pain ... may affect how bodies are oriented towards others, this does not mean we simply calculate pain” as if it were a property of an object

table, arguing, “It is through such painful encounters between this body and other objects, including other bodies, that ‘surfaces’ are felt as ‘being there’ in the first place.” Further, “the recognition of a sensation as being painful (from ‘it hurts’ to ‘it is bad’ to ‘move away’) also involves the reconstitution of bodily space, as the reorientation of the bodily relation to that which gets attributed as the cause of the pain” (24). In this sense, the experience of pain Ahmed describes does not just reveal surfaces, but also shapes them; an object recognized and judged as “hurtful” prompts bodily movement away, such that the object’s surface comes to be hard, pointy, and painful, while, in turn, the body’s surface becomes tender and vulnerable, or, alternately, hardened, through that contact. And while such contacts happen with objects such as coffee tables, they also, and perhaps more importantly, happen through social interactions.

For Ahmed, the surfaces created by emotions shape the space between self and other. While we might think of surfaces as closing bodies off from each other, Ahmed argues they open them up. She points out how “even feelings that are immediate, and which may involve ‘damage’ on the skin surfaces, are not simply feelings that one has, but feelings that open bodies to others” (15). For Ahmed, “to say that feelings are crucial to the forming of surfaces and borders is to suggest that what ‘makes’ those borders also unmakes them [or,] in other words, what separates us from others also connects us to others” (25). This ability to connect with others ties to Ahmed’s discussion to ethics.

(39-40). Ahmed explicitly refuses a connection with ontology here in that she does not find an object that causes pain to be a painful object. However, one can read this sense of surface with ontology, if only for the reason that it reveals a sense of doing that shapes the being one becomes in the world.

Suggesting that “an ethics of responding to pain involves being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel,” Ahmed proposes that we should not over-determine the boundaries of body and self and that we should not shy away from encounters that we might find painful or distressing (30). Rather, we should remain open to unexpected contacts so that the touch and feelings of others can move and affect and even shape us. Given her emphasis on pain, Ahmed’s argument can be read as espousing a self open to jostling, cognizant of his/her/hir own making and remaking by encounters and experiences, one that seeks points of connection not for their affirmation, but for their potential discomfort.

Queer Space

Queer subjects bring together Ahmed’s ethics of response with the issue of larger social spaces. Arguing that “heteronormativity functions as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape,” Ahmed connects norms to the shaping of space, noting that “the surfaces of social as well as bodily space ‘record’ the repetition of acts, and the passing by of some bodies and not others.” Speaking of a normative subject, she writes: “one does not notice this *as a world* when one has been shaped by that world, and even acquired its shape,” pointing to that subject’s lack of friction in moving through a world in which his/her/hir shape meets but does not rub against the spaces he/she/ze moves through (emphasis original 148).

Unlike normative, heterosexual subjects, queer subjects experience this world and its space differently: “When faced by the ‘comforts’ of heterosexuality,” queer subjects feel uncomfortable, as “the body does not ‘sink into’ a space that has already taken its shape.” Ahmed describes this discomfort as “a feeling of disorientation,” a “sense of out-of-place-ness and estrangement [that] involves an acute awareness of the surface of one's body, ... when one cannot inhabit the social skin, which is shaped by some bodies, and not others” (148). In this sense, the surfacing that Ahmed finds in the experience of emotions connects to the shape of normative social space; her uncomfortable queer subject becomes aware of a sense of not-fitting because she/he/ze moves through the world in a state of discomfort, edges noticeable in their abrasion. This discomfort can be productive.

Arguing, “we can posit the effects of ‘not fitting’ as a form of queer discomfort,” Ahmed suggests that we might find in that awkwardness “a discomfort which is generative, rather than simply constraining or negative,” for discomfort can be “*about inhabiting norms differently*” (emphasis original 155). Joining this sense of generative discomfort with Ahmed’s suggestion of an ethics for responding to pain, one can read how the practice Ahmed espouses of being open to the unexpected touch of an other also communicates an openness to the rough and abrasive edges of others who constantly rub against a world in which they do not quite fit. Put another way, the self open to pain can be read as a self open to jostling, a self also aware of and looking towards the friction of bodily surfacings, much like Ahmed’s productively uncomfortable

queer subject.⁶¹ This kind of contact acknowledges that while one cannot feel *as* another, one might be moved, jostled, or shaken by another into feeling *near* him/her/hir.

This sense of feeling *near* another helps to elucidate the kind of “thinking and feeling with” this chapter aims towards with regards to Jess’s character in *Stone Butch Blues*. This attention to proximity and feeling also leads to the question: does Jess’s changing emotional geography experience reflect Ahmed’s sense of a productive, queer discomfort? How does this relate to hir identity? And what of hir body, hir “stone”? In order to explore these questions, I now examine the way Jess’s corporeality, hir skin in the sense Ahmed uses, is shaped by interactions with the novel’s geography.

Stone, Ghosts, and Touch

Theresa could always sense when I was about to petrify like stone....
Those were the times she would tell me stories in bed –wonderful,
sensuous, tactile fantasies about how your body feels when you’re lying in
the sun Theresa could always melt my stone. – Jess Goldberg

I feel like a ghost, Edna. Like I’ve been buried alive. As far as the world’s
concerned, I was born the day I began to pass. I have no past, no loved
ones, no memories, no me. No one really sees me or speaks to me or
touches me. – Jess Goldberg

⁶¹ Notably, Ahmed points out that discomfort exists within queer spaces as well as without, and that “discomfort is itself a sign that queer spaces may extend to some bodies more than others (for example, some queer spaces might extend the mobility of white, middle-class bodies)” (151).

The titular “stone” of Jess’s butchness speaks to a history of contact between self and world. Read through Ahmed, this stone marks a bodily surface hardened in response to repeated experiences of pain and brutality, one melted only in brief moments by the gentle touch of an understanding lover.⁶² Thus while the Jess’s imagined landscapes express hir emotions, hir stony surface reveals another element of hir emotional experience, one that resonates with Ahmed’s writing on discomfort.

The repeated contacts that turn Jess to stone come from a world that has no place for hir.⁶³ In the corridor of hir high school, girls squeal while ze passes, “Is it animal, mineral, or vegetable?” and Jess reflects, “I didn’t fit any of their categories” (24). This lack of place comes across in later moments, such as when Jess is expelled from a friend’s funeral for not wearing a dress (117). And, out shopping, Jess has to leave a bathroom for fear of security guards’ coming and arresting hir for not being legibly female (59). Indeed, moments when Jess appears to be in the “wrong” place, or the wrong place at the wrong time, are also moments when some of the most violent scenes of the book occur. A brutal arrest for wearing men’s clothing at a gay bar –the cop on the verge of raping hir remarks “Aw, aint’ that cute, BVD’s. Fuckin’ pervert” (62) –

⁶² To note, Jess notices hir feeling of “stone” in a manner that echoes Ahmed’s sense of emotions as surfaces that one realizes are there, or that come into being, through social interaction. For example, when Jess responds to a friend’s careful inquiry moments after being released from jail, having narrowly avoided being raped, with the comment, “I was mortaring a brick wall inside myself,” we can see how hir “stone” comes up through social interactions rather than prior to them (36). This contact is what makes Jess come to realize the texture of hir feelings after hir experience of trauma.

⁶³ I realize that I use space and place somewhat interchangeably throughout this chapter. That said, I try to use the term place deliberately when there is connection (historical or not) with identity and/or feeling, as in a “place called home” and a social world with no place for those of indeterminate gender.

reveals how hir social world, here in the form of police officers, pushes into Jess and punishes hir for being in the wrong space –the gay underworld—and, implicitly, the wrong body, as a masculine female.⁶⁴ Employment also figures in this constricted and rough world; towards the middle of the novel Jess finds himself becoming more and more desperate for work after the end of the Vietnam war. Faced with a surplus of men, places that formerly hired butch women no longer do so. Responding to hir girlfriend Theresa's joy at the expansion of her world through the women's movement, Jess snorts: "Mine's shrinking" (151). In these experiences of being without a place in a larger social world, or being in a too-small place in this world, and in enduring the roughness of this world's touch, I read a combination of constriction and violence, a world that pushes and prods against Jess, that chafes by pushing hir out of spaces and/or forcing hir to alter himself to fit into them. These moments of "friction in the interstices" turn Jess to stone. And these repeatedly uncomfortable touches impel Jess towards the decision to take hormones and change from being a "he-she" to he.

Explaining hir decision to take hormones to Theresa, Jess states, "the hormones are like the looking glass for me"; ze argues: "if I pass through it, my world could open up, too" (151). A wider world, a bigger space, one not unlike hir imagined nature-scapes, lures Jess to medically transition. It is an anticipated contact with a world that has space for hir, that will not chafe, that impels Jess to take hormones. Indeed, when ze starts to

⁶⁴ The time period that Feinberg documents in this fictionalized account occurs prior to the Stonewall riots. Police raids on gay bars were a common practice, and arrests were made based on whether or not a person had the requisite three items of gender-specific clothing that matched their genital sex. People were often held without charges; Feinberg's tale is filled with numerous accounts of jobs lost because of a person's being unable to report to work after being kept in jail through the weekend without bail.

pass, ze notes how “at first, everything was fun,” “the world stopped feeling like a gauntlet I had to run through” (173). However, this soon changes.

After being on hormones for a number of months and successfully passing as male, Jess experiences a sense of disconnection from the world. In a conversation with Edna, a former lover, Jess speaks about feeling “like a ghost” (213). Ze reflects later, “passing didn’t just mean slipping below the surface, it meant being buried alive” (173). Passing, for Jess, disconnects hir and makes the touch between self and other ghostly rather than corporeal. Worried about the validity of hir driver’s license, impossible to renew in hir current state of embodiment, ze notes: “even as my world was expanding, it was shrinking” (175). And just before hir decision to stop hormones and not to pass, Jess laments, “there was no place outside of me where I belonged ... so every morning I willed myself back into existence” (209). Jess’s language in these moments communicates hir isolation as dislocation, as being forever apart in a shrinking world, as disorientation at the loss of the world’s touch. Passing buries Jess, placing hir too far below the surface, too far away from the rough touch of hir social world; still without a place, ze experiences the contact between self and other phantasmatic. In losing the constant friction of difference, Jess loses hirself.

When ze decides not to take hormones and not to fit so easily into hir social world, Jess chooses to come into closer contact with the world in spite of and even because of discomfort. Hir desire to stop passing is an attempt to reconnect with the world, to feel its touch anew, however rough. In the moment of reflection in front of the mirror when ze stops hir use of testosterone, Jess chooses the land over hir boat on “a

deathly calm sea,” picking the rough abrasion of social friction over the confinement and spectrality of loneliness (221). This moment also marks the point when Jess chooses to push back at hir world, to shape it rather than letting its abrasion and friction push into and shape hir. In this change, I read Ahmed’s ethics of productive and queer discomfort.

Jess’s decision not to pass is a decision to feel differently. Jess now walks “a gauntlet of strangers who stare,” and notes: “the only recognition I can find in their eyes is that I am ‘other’, ... I am different, ... I will always be different.” This difference has everything to do with Jess’s bodily surface: “I will never be able to nestle my skin against the comfort of sameness” (224). Hir not passing marks not just a liminal embodiment in terms of residing in a body legible as neither she nor he, but also an uncomfortable surfacing born of a choice to chafe against a gender-normative world, a choice that embraces a skin of discomfort.

Claiming Space

Jess’s reach towards and push against hir social world after deciding not to pass is evident in hir growing social activism. At the novel’s end, ze participates in a gay demonstration. No longer lurking in bars and subject to police brutality, the people at the demonstration claim public space as their space, something Jess has been scared to

do before this moment.⁶⁵ “Sick to death of [hir] silence,” Jess moves closer to the stage and climbs up. Finally putting hir feelings into words spoken out loud, ze says:

I watch protests and rallies from across the street. And part of me feels so connected to you all, but I don't know if I'm welcome to join. There's lots of us who are on the outside and we don't want to be I don't know what it would take to really change the world. But couldn't we get together and try to figure it out? Couldn't the *we* be bigger? Isn't there a way we could help fight each other's battles so that we're not always alone? (emphasis original 296)

For Jess, hir need to connect across possibly similar experiences of difference and discomfort, to no longer feel outside, at sea, lends itself to moving *with* others. This purposeful discomfort becomes a means for hir to enlarge a shared world, to make a bigger “we,” to bridge “outside” and inside. Jess’s decision to join and speak reveals how the kind of contacts ze seeks at the novel’s end are those made possible in a manner reminiscent of Ahmed’s ethics, in a self open to the unexpected, willing to feel and push back at the roughness of the world, eager to connect with others. Further, these connections are facilitated by Jess’s speaking hir feelings, feelings that earlier in the novel were only expressed through interactions with landscapes and textured intimacies. And this openness enables an important connection: an enlarged we made up of others who seek to claim and remake social space, to make a space where there was none before.

⁶⁵ It is notable that the novel stages this intervention in public space, expanding on what Don Mitchell would term the ideal of public space: “inclusiveness and unmediated interaction” (136). The “outside” Jess notes and the fact that this demonstration is needed, that an intervention should be staged at all in order to throw into relief the heteronormativity of most public spaces, speaks to the ways the novel documents how gay and lesbian interventions changed public space and pushed it towards a more idealized form and a more inclusive notion of public.

Moments after hir speech at the rally, a young butch approaches Jess to suggest that ze join her and some friends at a lesbian dance in the coming weeks. When Jess demurs, saying “I don’t know if I can deal with arguing my way into a women’s dance,” the young butch suggests they all meet outside, saying, “We could all go in together. Nobody’ll hassle you if we’re all together.” Jess responds by saying, “I’m scared, but I do want to go” (297). Connected by spoken feelings –fear—and implicit ones –hope, the lure of camaraderie—Jess and the young butch come together to reshape a specifically lesbian space, one whose narrow gender norms have kept them outside in the recent past. This imagined future group is cemented by the idea that, if they stick together, they can avoid discomfort and reshape the contours of a space regulated by gender, thereby expanding what it is to be part of the lesbian and nascent queer community by rupturing the divide of outside/inside.⁶⁶ In this sense, connections forged through spoken feelings at the novel’s end are key to how Jess comes to push back at and change the social spaces that used to rub against and constrict hir.

At the beginning of this chapter, I noted that the literal homes Jess makes are a way for hir to exteriorize hir growing comfort with a body tied to a non-normative gender identity. But there are other homes in the novel, the journey to which underscores Jess’s changing contact with hir world at the novel’s end. After making a home together in New York City, Jess and Ruth venture north, Ruth to her natal home

⁶⁶ I make the distinction between lesbian and queer in this context because “queer” as a term re-appropriated from its use as an epithet post-dates much of the history that Feinberg details. That said, the kind of political and sexual space that Feinberg and the young butch seek to build typifies Western queer movements in their embrace of gender variance and, frequently, anti-assimilationist politics.

and Jess to Buffalo, the home of hir youth. They begin their trip with plenty of toilet paper, choosing not to risk a rest stop; their motto: “the world is our restroom” (278). This approach makes of the land they cross a friction-less space of safety. However, they soon part ways, and Jess heads to Buffalo to confront old friends and visit old haunts, leaving Ruth with her family at Canandaigua Lake.

One of the visits Jess makes is to Butch Al, the mentor who taught hir how to be butch when ze ran away from home so long ago, now living in an asylum after suffering a stroke. Al’s elderly roommate tells hir “she doesn’t talk to mortals ... she can’t hear you,” to which Jess replies, “It’s OK, I’m a ghost” (286). Jess turns to Al, who grips hir arm like a claw, and, “her face contorted with anger,” growls “Don’t bring me back” (287). Realizing that Al had survived by “forgetting, going to sleep, going away,” Jess apologizes, and Al returns for a moment, assured by Jess that “I’m real, but only you can see me” (288). However, Al soon fades away again, snarling “I’m dead” and leaving Jess holding her now-cold hand. Ghostlike, Jess whispers, “It’s just that I came all this way, across all these years, to tell you how much I love you, and now it’s too late” (289). This spectral conversation, Al “dead” and Jess passing as a ghost, reveals how while Jess hopes to speak hir feelings from the past into this present, ze is not always heard. The landscape has changed, the people ze knew buried or closed-off, and while ze tries to move the feelings of hir younger self across time, the Buffalo of this present cannot receive the love and heartache of hir past. Saying what hir younger self was unable to express out loud, Jess attempts to touch Al with hir love, hir feelings, only to be haunted, instead, by Al’s death.

After this visit, a confused Jess journeys to collect Ruth. When ze pulls the car in front of Ruth's mother's house, ze notes: "Mist draped the hills. The surface of Canandaigua Lake mirrored bright blue" (290). In this moment, ze echoes Ruth, who introduces Jess to hir family home earlier by noting, "I could never figure out if this lake mirrored my mood swings or if my moods reflected the changes in the lake" (279). Greeted by a happy Ruth and fresh-baked pie, Jess sees hir own joy in Ruth in the literal nature-scape surrounding Ruth's home. Even though ze feels frustrated by hir ghostly journey to Buffalo, Jess continues to transform hir world, finding in the literal landscape what before ze had only seen in an imaginary one: hir feelings.

Jess begins *Stone Butch Blues* alone. Ze runs away from home, joins a community of butches and femmes and queens who experience a brutal world together, leaves that community when hir gender expression becomes unwelcome, starts and stops testosterone, moves to New York City, stops passing, and finds a new home. Indeed, ze finds several new homes. I wanted to tell hir story in the order I have done throughout this chapter, rather than the order I laid out just now, because I wanted to develop an understanding of Jess's experience not through hir bodily identity, but rather through the ways that hir body, identity, and feelings connect with the spaces, social and otherwise, ze experiences throughout the novel. I wanted to share what I have come to understand by thinking and feeling with Jess, that the shared imaginings at the novel's conclusion demonstrate how the transformation at the heart of *Stone Butch Blues* is a transformation in the relationship among feelings, space, identity, and society.

Coda: Scars and Memories

The characters' shared and hopeful imaginings of reshaped political and cultural spaces also inflects another emotional relationship: that between reader and text. Jess's changes in how ze experiences emotions and space, in conjunction with hir development of political connections with others, can be read as a means to encourage a similar move on the part of hir readers. Indeed, the book's formal structure – it begins with a second person address – and its content – the narrative is both dramatic and emotion-packed throughout – can be seen as elements that prompt its readers towards a different mode of relating and responding. Ahmed's sense of the role of scars helps me articulate this relationship between reader and text.

Suggesting that we rethink the relationship between emotion and physical scars, Ahmed pushes us to change our understanding of what a “good” scar might be. Rather than take up the accepted wisdom that a “good” scar is an invisible scar, Ahmed tells us to think of a good scar as “one that sticks out, a lumpy sign on the skin,” a physical reminder “that recovering from injustice cannot be about covering over the injuries.” For Ahmed, “ ‘just emotions’ might be ones that work *with* and *on* rather than *over* the wounds that surface as traces of past injuries in the present” (202). This sense of good scars and justice through emotions augments my reading of *Stone Butch Blues* in terms of the histories of touch the novel conveys. By beginning hir novel with a letter to an ex-lover written in the second person, Feinberg draws hir readers in and makes them the

“you” that the novel addresses.⁶⁷ This kind of address, in conjunction with the novel’s rich emotional content, aims to touch Feinberg’s readers, to lure them into better understandings of the kinds of change Jess’s experience communicates. Because this touch is textured by feelings, and because Feinberg’s writing indexes a history of rough encounters and uncomfortable touches, the contact that Feinberg lures readers into is often abrasive, a rough touch that communicates the discomfort of Jess’s experience to Feinberg’s readers, one that conveys the scarring of past encounters.

If we take a good scar to be a reminder, a means to prompt a particular kind of remembering, we can see how feelings shape the political stakes of the encounter Feinberg stages between book and reader. A good scar as a scar that reminds us “*of how it shapes the body*” prompts and encourages a kind of witnessing (emphasis original 202). The hapticity of this reminder fosters a specific kind of proximity, a feeling near, but one that lingers in the double meaning of feeling highlighted by Eve Sedgwick: “tactile plus emotional” (*Touching Feeling* 16). The act of feeling a good scar is the act of touching it, a contact that conveys, in turn, the textures and physical impressions of past bodily shapings. Read as an index of scars, of good scars, *Stone Butch Blues* encourages a kind of touch that is a feeling between Jess and the absent reader invoked at the novel’s beginning. The history of emotions in these scars reveals the kind of affective, queer politics I hope to engage in this reading. Rather than encouraging the reader to focus on

⁶⁷ See p. 73-79 of Anne Cvetcovitch’s *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* for more on this method of beginning the novel.

whether Jess looks male or female (an impossible task for a reader who cannot see Jess, even if she/he/ze can attempt to look at Feinberg), the kind of good scarring that Feinberg's writing conveys in its touch prompts the reader to pay attention and respond to how Jess feels. A good scar as something that does not cover over, but "*exposes the injury*," such that one cannot not witness it, cannot not remember in the very material sense of re-member, can be read as a kind of queer politics practiced through a space of reading shaped, scarred, by emotion (emphasis original 202). In my reading, the kinds of scars that map Jess's surface, in conjunction with the necessary touch that Feinberg encourages through the novel's structure, lure Feinberg's readers into a mode of remembering through touch, through feeling, through histories of feeling, that speaks not to transgender as a concept of liminality, but to transgender experiences as they index specific histories of difference that shape, change, and scar them. In my reading, Jess encourages us to feel near and be touched by hir experiences, pushing us to understand how feeling differently can help us also to build and reshape our shared landscapes so that they too might come to have space for new and emergent identities.

Chapter Five:

Monster Trans: Diffracting Affect, Reading Rage

Everywhere I see bliss from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. – The monster, *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley

I want to lay claim to the dark power of my monstrous identity without using it as a weapon against others or being wounded by it myself. I will say this as bluntly as I know how: I am a transsexual, and therefore I am a monster.... Like the monster, the longer I live in these conditions, the more rage I harbor. Rage colors me as it presses in through the pores of my skin, soaking in until it becomes the blood that courses through my beating heart.... But there is another rage within. – Susan Stryker

Textured by rage, tempered by writing, the relationship between Susan Stryker's transsexual monstrosity and Victor Frankenstein's monster produces a uniquely queer fury that reaches kraken-like into the space of reading. Moving with the sticky suction of cephalopod limbs, this affect seeks to shape with its touch, to convey change through feeling, so that reading the written word becomes an encounter that transforms. This chapter examines the affect that shapes Stryker's response to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage." Unlike other readers of *Frankenstein*, I do not attempt to answer the numerous questions the book's form and enigmatic characters pose. Nor do I read for reflections between Stryker's and *Frankenstein*'s monsters. Instead, drawing from work in feminist science studies, I diffract Stryker through Shelley by examining key nodes in *Frankenstein* that act as gratings through which Stryker's response shines, allowing me to examine how the relationship between the texts produces a space of reading that both promises and prompts transformation.

On diffraction

Arguing that “what we need is to make a difference in material-semiotic apparatuses, to diffract the rays of technoscience so that we get more promising interference patterns on the recording films of our lives and bodies,” Donna Haraway prefers diffraction to critical reflexivity. For Haraway, diffraction is “an optical metaphor for the effort to make a difference in the world” (*Modest Witness* 16), “a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction”; diffraction patterns reveal not “where differences appear, but rather ... where the *effects* of differences appear” (*Haraway Reader* 70). Connecting optics to knowledge claims as a way of seeing that works in and through difference, diffraction joins embodied vision with ways of knowing that encourage new understandings.

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Karen Barad describes the physics of diffraction:

Two slits are cut into a screen or some other barrier that blocks light. A target screen is placed behind and parallel to the screen that has slits in it. When the slits are illuminated by a light source, a diffraction or interference pattern appears on the target screen. That is, there is a pattern marked by alternating bands of bright and dark areas: bright spots appear in places where the waves enhance one another –that is, where there is “constructive interference” – and dark spots appear where the waves cancel each other –that is, where there is “destructive interference.” (78)

This explanation articulates the physical interactions that produce diffraction patterns: light or matter shining through slits and mapping out patterns onto a target screen. These “constructive” and “destructive” interference patterns shape the method of this chapter.

Like the screen described by Barad, Shelley's *Frankenstein* has several nodes that act as slits through which Stryker's furious words move: gender, language, kinship, and monstrosity. Impelled by Stryker's fury, her words travel through these nodes and map out patterns of specific difference onto a second screen, the reader. And while Stryker's need to relate to Frankenstein's monster, to trace the ways that she, like him, has been made monstrous, the patterns her words produce reveal specific differences. Indeed, passage through *Frankenstein* changes the ways that Stryker's words signify, and the constructive and destructive interference patterns they form reveals a transformation in their meanings that pushes at the reader. A diffractive understanding of the texts' intra-actions demonstrates these alterations, revealing not moments of mirroring and seeming sameness between the authors' respective monsters, but rather spaces where Stryker's words reveal a different and potent kind of monstrosity from that of Shelley's monster, one that promises new and critical senses of kinship, being, and understanding.⁶⁸

In Brief

Stryker's "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," a published version of a 1993 performance piece, describes the resonances between her experiences as a transsexual woman with those of Victor Frankenstein's creation. Rendered in "the dark, watery images of Romanticism,"

⁶⁸ To note, I call Frankenstein's creation "monster" throughout the rest of this chapter, for while "monster" is only one of many shifting signifiers used to name Frankenstein's creature, as a term, "monster" helpfully embodies an uncomfortable multiplicity of signifiers.

Stryker's disjointed writing sutures theory with poetry with prose (254). Monstrous affect at its most material shapes her work and her body. She uses the "transgender rage" that colors her "as it presses in through [her] skin" (249), constituting her in her primal form (252), to "claim the dark power of [her] monstrous identity," writing: "I am a transsexual and therefore I am a monster" (246).

Shelley's *Frankenstein*, set in the late 18th century, initially published in 1818 and edited and re-issued in 1831, details Victor Frankenstein's discovery of how to bestow "animation upon lifeless matter" (53). Told in epistolary form from the viewpoint of Walton, an explorer Frankenstein encounters in the icy seas near the North Pole, the novel dramatizes the tormented battle between creator and creation. Unable to "endure the aspect of the being" (58) he creates, whom he calls a "miserable monster," "demoniacal corpse," and "wretch" (59), Victor flees and lapses into illness; a number of years go by before they encounter each other again. In their next meeting, in the Swiss Alps, the monster tells Frankenstein about his search for kinship and affection in the face of constant rejection by humankind. Moved by the monster's words, Frankenstein agrees to create a female with whom the monster might live in "the interchange of sympathies necessary for [his] being" (147), a promise he later breaks because of worries about a "race of devils" (170) being propagated upon the earth. Enraged, the monster then systematically murders those Victor holds dear. The chase scene that begins and ends the novel is fueled by the monster's and Frankenstein's rage, and both endure the hardships the icy Northern landscape offers through a steady hunger for "revenge, ... dearer than light or food!" (173).

The Promises of Monsters⁶⁹

Stryker explains that “‘Monster’ is derived from the Latin noun *monstrum*, ‘divine portent,’ itself formed on the root of the verb *monere*, ‘to warn,’” she notes that, historically, “monsters, like angels, functioned as messengers and heralds of the extraordinary” (247). For example, in 1573 Ambroise Paré asserted that “monsters are things that appear outside the course of Nature,” their causes including the glory of God and his wrath, as well as “Demons and Devils” (3-4). Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park argue for a shifting legibility of monsters dating from the European 15th century to the early 18th, finding that while early modern monsters were legible as horrific prodigies that warned of doom (181) and spectacles that elicited pleasure and fright, late-seventeenth-century aesthetics changed conceptions of monsters to repugnant creatures “that violated the standards of regularity and decorum ... in nature, ... society and the arts” (202). And in *Abnormal*, Michel Foucault traces a shift in the mid-eighteenth century from monsters conceived as “the undue mixture of what should be separated by nature,” “juridico-natural” monstrosity, to a “monstrosity of conduct,” “juridico-moral” monstrosity (73). Both visibly deformed and, ultimately, morally reprehensible, *Frankenstein*’s mid-eighteenth century monster notably combines “juridico-natural” and “juridico-moral” monstrosity in a form that not only scares his fellow characters but also fascinates them and his readers.

⁶⁹ This subsection’s title plays upon Haraway’s essay of the same name, “The Promises of Monsters: a Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others.”

Jeffrey Cohen emphasizes the “ontological liminality” (6) of monsters, arguing that “the monster is best understood as an embodiment of difference, a breaker of category, and a resistant Other known only through process and movement, never through dissection-table analysis” (x). Monsters reveal “that difference is arbitrary and potentially free-floating, mutable rather than essential”; they threaten “to destroy not just individual members of society, but the very cultural apparatus through which individuality is constituted and allowed” (12). Both Shelley and Stryker’s monsters pose this kind of threat, as each attempts the destruction of values key to social norms. Indeed, the diffraction gratings in Shelley’s text through which Stryker’s words pass mark a number of threatened concepts, the first of which is gender.

Frankenstein, Woman, Monsteress

Rough stitches join monstrosity, gender, and the “human,” in Stryker’s and Shelley’s texts, grouping together seemingly isolated social norms into a shared cultural threat. Stryker’s “queer gender,” apparent in her statement that, “like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment,” illustrates how gender and the “human” are central to her sense of monstrosity. Contemporary queer theorists echo this connection; Judith Butler asserts that gender “figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of a legible humanity” (*Undoing Gender* 11). Readers of Shelley’s novel also extend this connection; Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s landmark 1979 analysis read in it a rewriting of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in which the monster figures both as “Eve and ... Eve’s double, Sin” (239).

And Stryker draws from Peter Brooks's *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* to emphasize the tension in Shelley's novel between "a visually oriented epistemology," knowing by seeing coded as masculine, and a mode of "knowing the truth of bodies that privileges verbal linguisticity," knowing by speaking and hearing, coded as feminine. The monster's failure as a viable visible subject coupled with his lyrical orations "offers a feminine, and potentially feminist, resistance to definition by phallicized scopophilia" for Stryker (247).

Focusing on the resonances among the positions and descriptions of women in the text and those of the monster, Fred Botting articulates another connection between female and monster in *Frankenstein*. The novel's consistent emphasis on *Frankenstein's* female characters' angelic nature, the monster's description of himself as a "fallen angel" (Shelley 103), and the monster's position as "a voyeur of human cultural practices," place him in a position "comparable to the place of women" (Botting 110) in the novel, who also see differently. As Victor notes, women pay "sedulous attention" (Shelley 159) to that to which men are blind. Further, while the monster comments on the "arbitrary nature of language" (Botting 111) in noting that speech has no "apparent connection with visible objects" (Shelley 115), Elizabeth, Victor Frankenstein's intended, laments injustice by describing men "as monsters thirsting for each other's blood" (95). The ability to recognize the arbitrariness of linguistic and social orders makes both the women and the monster cultural outsiders, able to counteridentify with "dominant social discourse ... and thus make it into an other," endowing women with "a threatening, monstrous capacity" (111).

For Botting “the monster’s marginal place, neither outside nor inside, is ... the place of differences, of others whose monstrousness is that they cannot be finally fixed in one place alone” (113). Just as Cohen asserts that individual monsters embody “a resistant Other known only through process and movement, never through dissection-table analysis” (x), Botting reveals a mutable and shifting connection between the feminine and the monstrous in *Frankenstein* that offers the potential for resistance, or as Stryker puts it, a “potentially feminist resistance” (247). However, Botting also argues that the novel’s women are contained in a way that the monster is not:

Female positions in *Frankenstein* shift, evince the capacity for monstrous disruption, but do not become completely allied with the position of the monster. Women are, on the whole, contained as others, a silent threat whose suppression is overwhelming. Resistance is only implied, as at the very edges of the text, in positions like the one occupied by Mrs. Saville [the novel’s absent reader/correspondent], and from there, perhaps, among certain reading positions. (112)

Ultimately, for Botting, the novel’s women are not monstrous in the same way as Frankenstein’s monster, for the threat they pose to the world of the novel is limited, and their verbal expressions of counteridentification are silenced. Indeed, just before her death, a visibly distraught Elizabeth insists to Victor that her “heart is contented,” and attempts to “divert her thoughts and [Victor’s] from all reflection upon melancholy subjects” (Shelley 197). Moments such as this one reveal how women’s formerly direct speech about troubling matters is ultimately silenced in the novel.

The problems Stryker raises regarding gender, language, and transsexuality reveal how gender in *Frankenstein* acts as a diffraction grating for her words. Asserting that “transsexual monstrosity ... can never claim quite so secure a means of resistance” as

Frankenstein's monster, Stryker contrasts the monster's speech with that of trans persons. While the monster speaks powerfully, "the inability of language to represent the transgendered subject's movement over time between stably gendered positions in a linguistic structure" (247) makes transpeople unable to act in a similar fashion; they cannot harness language to make the persuasive orations that serve the monster so well. However, trans people are also not contained in the manner that *Frankenstein's* women are; while the women in *Frankenstein* shift from critical outsiders to being mostly contained and silenced, transgendered subjects' un-representability can be seen as pushing language itself to change and become more "speculative," as I noted in my second chapter. By bringing into question the stability of gender in language, trans people can make the act of gendering through language a conscious process, altering the way language itself functions and enacting the counteridentification that *Frankenstein's* women ultimately fail to express.

In this sense, Stryker's transsexually monstrous gender moves through that of *Frankenstein* and amplifies the instability Botting highlights, pushing against gender norms and mapping a out a gender marked by difference. Moreover, Stryker links gender with a sense of feminist resistance that addresses not just the female-bodied and human others of humanity, but also non-human others and other ways of differing. She avows: "I find no shame, however, in acknowledging my egalitarian relationship with non-human material Being; everything emerges from the same matrix of possibilities" (247). Connecting gender, feminism, and different modes of differing, Stryker's words diffract

through *Frankenstein's* doing of gender and demarcate a sense of gender crafted through constructive interference, one that connects with and through difference writ large.

Frankenstein and The Human

Structurally oriented readings of *Frankenstein* reveal another important diffraction grating in the text: the human. Taking up the moment when Victor Frankenstein, fearing that a female monster paired with the existing male might propagate a “race of devils” (Shelley 170), destroys the inanimate body of the female monster, Botting argues that Victor fears this “new race would separate the monster from the human and initiate a new and threatening system of differences” (113). Victor’s destructive act effaces not just the “potential for the system to differ from its own difference” (Girard 21), but also the potential for an “affective chain *outside* humanity” (Brooks, “Godlike Science, Unhallowed Arts” 598). Botting further argues that Victor’s actions preserve the humanity of human, for “without ‘monster’ to establish, through difference, [this humanity], ‘human’ would cease to have one of its specific and privileged meanings” (113). Similarly, Halberstam posits that Frankenstein’s monster, “by embodying what is not human, produces the human as discursive effect” (45). I read the human in *Frankenstein* differently.

Rather than acting as the constitutive outside of “human,” the monstrous in *Frankenstein* lies within the human.⁷⁰ Unlike werewolves, Frankenstein’s monster is not a hybrid of human and animal. Rather, the monster’s lack of humanity lies in the border between life and death, animate and inanimate, lively body and cadaver.⁷¹ Describing the process that led him to “bestow animation upon lifeless matter,” Victor Frankenstein notes: “Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world” (55). Victor’s creation becomes monstrous because he unsettles the divisions of life and death, animate and inanimate.⁷² However, as the novel’s characters, Victor in particular, also skirt this line, the monster’s creation makes “human” itself a mutable concept within the novel.

Immediately following the animation of his “miserable monster” (56), Victor becomes very ill, stating: “I became lifeless, and did not recover my senses for a long, long time” (62). The novel is replete with such moments, as in the reader’s first encounter with Victor, at the beginning of the novel and end of the story (in the formalist sense), when he comes aboard Walton’s (the letter-writer) ship, and is “restored to animation” by being rubbed with brandy (26). The frequency of Victor’s becoming ill in this manner indicates that the boundary his monster transgresses, that between death

⁷⁰ See Giorgio Agamben’s *The Open: Man and Animal*, for another reading of the role of the inside and outside in the boundaries between human and non-human.

⁷¹ Indeed, the monster resembles a zombie in a number of ways, but his movements are driven by vengeance, not a blind lust for flesh. However, whether he is haunted by the racism and colonialism that shape much of the Western world’s twentieth-century perceptions and representations of zombies is an extremely interesting question.

⁷² Sianne Ngai explores the persistent association of race with animacy in *Ugly Feelings*, arguing that the excesses perceived in animate bodies have a long history of being used as a means of racialization (“Animatedness,” 89-125).

and life, inanimation and liveliness, is one that Victor himself continually skirts. In the context of a human determined by sustained animacy, Victor himself inhabits the liminality between life and death, animate and inanimate, and therefore human and non-human.

Rather than revealing Victor as partially monstrous, his traversal of the animate/inanimate and, in this context, human/ non-human boundaries demonstrates how the non-human is contained *within* the human rather than acting as its constitutive outside in Shelley's novel. Difference does not happen just through the divide of sexual difference, male/ female, and difference does not constitute the division of human/ non-human in the novel. Rather, difference happens *within* the human, rupturing the boundaries-oriented structural thinking of constitutive outsides and making the human an important diffraction grating in the text. Over a century later, Stryker's words pass through this grating, resulting in a complex interference pattern. However, before examining this diffraction, I explore the ramifications of this difference within the human, for in its mutability, the human in *Frankenstein* changes what it means to be a "kind" of being, and, through that, changes in what it means to be "kin."

Kin, Kind, and Kindness

Frankenstein's and his monster's disparate conceptions of kin have everything to do with the kinds of reproduction and, ultimately, difference, at stake in *Frankenstein*. The novel in general and the monster's narrative in particular delineate a sense of kinship that

functions outside of the norms of the heterosexual/ gender matrix, revealing another key diffraction grating: kinship forged by feeling.

Frankenstein first challenges heterosexual reproduction through Victor's act of creation. After telling Walton about the "days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue" leading to his discovery, Victor ruminates on the kind of father he might become:

A new species would bless me as its creator and source No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs These thoughts supported my spirits, while I pursued my undertaking with unremitting ardour. (55)

As we well know, upon animation of the creature, this dream turns to "horror and disgust" (58). And while later, moved by his monster's tale, Victor agrees to create a female monster, he ultimately destroys "the half-finished creature" (175) in a moment of wrath. Victor fears not only that a female monster might also "turn with disgust from [the male monster] to the superior beauty of man" and leave the monster once more alone, but also that, should the two monsters indeed fall into sympathy with each other, "one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of man a condition precarious and full of terror" (171). His actions reveal a remarkable assumption.

That Victor should assume that the monster can reproduce at all contravenes the novel's premise of generation outside of heterosexual reproduction. Motivated by a conception of kinship rooted in a heterosexual matrix of reproduction, Victor's

destruction of the female monster disregards the fact that his act of creation and new mode of fatherhood disarticulate that very matrix. Indeed, while Victor's interpretation of his act troubles and confuses questions of kinship –he first sees himself as a father/creator in a non-heterosexual if patriarchal mode of generation, then acts in fear of heterosexual reproduction conceived as the undoing of humanity – his own experience of kinship differs greatly from the monster's understanding of family.

For the monster, kinship has everything to do with feeling. Describing the “kindness and affection” (110) he witnesses for the first time among the De Lacey, occupants of a cottage next to the hovel in which the monster finds refuge after fleeing first Victor and then angry villagers, the monster experiences “sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature: ... a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as [he] had never before experienced, either from hunger or cold, warmth or food” (111). The monster soon connects emotions to language, for he realizes that the De Lacey “possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds” and he perceives that “the words they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances of the hearers” (115). Among the first words he learns through watching the cottagers, after ones with obvious referents – “fire,” “milk,” “bread,” and “wood” – are those of kinship and affect: “father,” “sister,” “Agatha,” “son,” “good,” “dearest,” and “unhappy” (115). Thus, while there are a number of benefits for the monster in language acquisition –he becomes a subject and he can participate in a world of meaning – the understanding he reaches regarding this tie between emotions and speech is very important. In learning language, the monster

comes to regard emotions as bonds of affection and ties of relation with others.

Language, for the monster, provides the affective glue of kinship.

Unlike Frankenstein, the monster does not view the bonds of family as crafted through heterosexual reproduction. While Victor has two doting parents and goes so far as to marry his adopted sister, the monster's sense of family stems from what he sees as a voyeur. He notes that when he first begins watching the De Lacey, "what chiefly struck me was the gentle manners of these people; and I longed to join them, but dared not" (113). And witnessing the younger De Lacey interacting with their blind father, he is impressed: "Nothing could exceed the love and respect which the younger cottagers exhibited towards their venerable companion." This love and respect is apparent in their performing "every little office of affection and duty with gentleness" (113). As he sees the younger De Lacey go hungry in order to feed their father, the monster finds that, "this trait of kindness [moves him] sensibly" (114), and he begins, in his invisible way, to aid them. Later, in a moment of loneliness that begins his disastrous overture to the family, he wonders:

But where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses From my earliest remembrance I had been as then I was in height and proportion. I had never seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I? I will soon explain to what these feelings tended; but allow me now to return to the cottagers, whose story excited in me ... various feelings ... which all terminated in additional love and reverence for my protectors (for so I loved, in an innocent, half-painful self-deceit, to call them). (124)

The monster's desire for family quickly moves to the family he desires: the De Lacey.

His love and reverence lead him to claim them as kin, as well he might, given that his acquisition of language and entry into a world of meaning is due to their unwitting

teachings. This sense of kinship, however, does not stem from any need for blood ties and/or formal unions legible to church and state; for the monster, the relations of kinship, as witnessed in the interactions between the younger and elder De Lacey, are about caring. In the monster's understanding, kinship is kindness.

The monster's connection between kinship and kindness is most striking in his exchange with Victor Frankenstein above Chamounix. After he finishes his tale, the monster proposes to Victor: "You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of sympathies necessary for my being" (147). When Victor is not quite persuaded, the monster swears "by the earth" he inhabits and by "you who made me" that, with the companion Victor bestows, he will "quit the neighborhood of man" and his "evil passions will have fled, for [he] shall meet with sympathy!" (149). The monster's plea, while it emphasizes the need for another of his "kind," articulates the bond he imagines between himself and a female companion as consisting of an "interchange of sympathies," not semen. And while his craving is couched in heteronormative terms in his explicit request for a female, he desires this other monster as one who will enter into the affective bonds of kinship, one who will exchange with him the kindness that, for the monster, *is* kinship.⁷³ This sense of kinship acts as a diffraction grating between Stryker and Shelley.

⁷³ This desire fits into the ways that *Frankenstein* contains its females, for, as scholars of affective labor have remarked, emotional work, or this kind of feminized labor, is endemic to not just the landed gentry and aristocratic spaces in which Frankenstein moved, but also the more recent labor markets that have moved away from the localized homes Frankenstein espouses. Indeed, feminized affective labor is central to the labor

Affect, “Intra-actions,” and Becoming Monstrous

Anger propels Stryker’s words through the narrow diffraction gratings in *Frankenstein* onto the screen of the reader. And anger pushes Stryker to declare herself “like the monster.” But how does her anger diffract the monster’s? How does it move her and/or her words? In order to answer these questions, I turn to the monster’s fury, for it shapes him in ways that speak to Stryker’s rage.

“I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend” (103), the monster tells Victor at the outset of their encounter above Chamounix. As he moves from describing his initial voyeurism to the overture that ends the possibility for any reciprocal relationship with the De Laceys, he relates to Victor “events, that impressed me with feelings which, from what I had been, have made me what I am” (119). Making it clear that his unhappiness and misery stem from the manner in which Victor’s “fellow-creatures ... spurn and hate” him, the monster argues that desolation and feeling hated shape his actions; he asks, “Shall I not then hate those who abhor me?” For the monster, this connection is clear: “I am miserable, and they shall share my wretchedness” (103). The scorn, fear, disgust, and attacks that the monster endures from Victor’s fellow creatures shape the monster’s own feelings, such that his sense of wretchedness turns to

formations of modern capitalisms. The fact that the monster’s longing for affective kinship is meant to be served by a female of his kind underscores the text’s (ultimate) reinforcement of normative femininity, even in its imagined monsteresses.

fury and becomes his own furious movements, a transformation which makes him monstrous.⁷⁴

Further, in the monster's tale, his names for himself double with those that Victor uses to describe him, revealing another manner in which he becomes monstrous. In the initial moments of their encounter above Chamounix, after Victor exclaims "Begone, vile insect!" the monster states how he "expected this reception, all men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things!". Asking Victor to be calm and not attack him, the monster entreats: "Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery?" (102). Throughout the story of his life as relayed to Victor, the monster names himself with many of the same words that Victor interchanges with "monster": "wretched," "miserable," "hellish," "fiend," and "detestable." This traffic in language reveals how being a monster, in the language of the

⁷⁴ The monster's becoming monstrous also happens through his failure as a specular subject, a fact which Stryker highlights. His sense of the De Lacey's beauty shapes how he reads of himself. He describes one of his first looks at the family as "a lovely sight, even to me ... who had never beheld aught beautiful before" (110), and his stories of the family members redound with descriptors such as "graceful," "beauty," "fine" etc. And when the monster first sees his own reflection, he contrasts it with that of the De Laceys, stating

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. (116-117)

Here, echoing Lacan's mirror stage, the monster views himself as monstrous and terrifying in contrast with the De Laceys. Thus his failure to be legible in a manner similar to that of those he watches and longs for as also leads him to name himself "monster."

novel, is not just a matter of appearance, but also one of feeling: wretched, miserable, and, perhaps above all, furious.

The event that most contributes to the monster's becoming monstrous begins when he takes advantage of a momentary absence of the younger family members to enter the cottage and speak to the blind elder De Lacey. This encounter, when the monster hears for the first time "the voice of kindness directed towards" him, is abruptly cut off by the arrival of the rest of the family, at which point the women faint and/or flee while the son, Felix, attacks the monster "in a transport of fury" (137). After leaving, the monster returns to the cottage, hoping to win over the elderly De Lacey, and sees that his "protectors had departed, and had broken the only link that held (him) to the world." This moment initiates the monster's rage: "for the first time feelings of revenge and hatred filled my bosom, and I did not strive to control them; but allowing myself to be borne away by the stream, I bent my mind towards injury and death" (140). "Like the archfiend," the monster is carried by a "hell within" him (138), and spurred on by the way his cottagers had "spurned and deserted" him, overcome by a "rage of anger" (140), he burns the cottage down. In this sequence, the monster becomes monstrous *through* encounters shaped by the affect of others – the turning and running away of fear, the bodily attacks of anger. His is a being crafted through feeling, and his becoming-monstrous happens through being shaped by monstrous feelings, by the what Karen Barad would term the "intra-actions" of monstrous affect.

"Intra-actions," Affect, and Monstrosity

Focusing on the writings of Neils Bohr, Karen Barad's "intra-actions" describe how encounters come to divide self from other. Arguing that, for Bohr, objects such as atoms do not "have well-defined intrinsic properties that are representable as abstract universal concepts" ("Agential Realism" 3) independent of their observation, Barad notes, "the physical and conceptual apparatuses (in an experiment) form a nondualistic whole." For Bohr, "descriptive concepts obtain their meaning by reference to a particular physical apparatus which in turn marks the placement of a constructed cut between the 'object' and 'agencies of observation'" (4). Atoms, for example, are not stable and static objects with determinable properties outside of their being observed, but rather come to *be* through observation, through becoming phenomena. Thus, trails in a cloud chamber that mark the path of electrons are electrons-in-phenomena, not just evidence of electrons' passage. And Barad asserts that "reality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena, but things-in-phenomena" (7), such that objects exist only in those conditions through which they appear, or objects come to *be* through and within encounters. Therefore, electrons exhibit the properties of particles in one experiment and waves in another, and Barad/Bohr's universe finds no contradiction, for the reality of things-in-phenomena makes them consistent.

Barad's argument fundamentally addresses the divide between self and other. Objects-in-phenomena do not pre-exist those encounters in which they come to be, for it is the encounter that divides an object from "agencies of observation" (4). This sense of encounter expands Barad's description from the meeting between knower and object – an atoms' becoming distinct from scientists and the experimental/ conceptual

apparatus—to the meeting of self and other. In this reading, self and other do not encounter one another, boundaries intact, and then separate with the same boundaries, but rather, self and other *become* separate through the process of encountering. Barad names these moments “intra-actions,” signifying the inseparability of object (atoms) and agencies of observation (scientist, conceptual/experimental apparatus), self and other, through a prefix that indicates how boundaries arise within and through such encounters, rather than prior to them.

In Barad’s thinking, intra-actions also reformulate traditional causality, opening “up a space for material-discursive forms of agency, including human, non-human, and cyborgian varieties.” Because self and other, “subject” and “object,” become such through encounters and do not exist prior to their intra-actions, “agency cannot be designated as an attribute” of either. Barad writes: “Agency is a matter of intra-acting, it is an enactment, not something someone or something has” (7).⁷⁵ Subjects, objects, humans, and non-humans, no longer limited to assumptions regarding pre-existing and/or continuous properties, flourish in an intra-active universe and participate in the enactment of agency.

In light of Barad’s argument, the monster’s sense of being “bourne away” (140) by a stream of revenge and hatred, of being carried by a “hell within” him (138), reveals that the De Lacey’s and others’ reactions to him are also intra-actions with him. The affect of these intra-actions not only cuts the ties between the monster and the De

⁷⁵ This insight reflects Bruno Latour and Michel Callon’s Actor-Network Theory (ANT) in its conceptualization of distributed agency. The sense of self and other becoming such through encounters also resonates with interventions in psychoanalysis.

Laceys, but also constitutes the monster as monstrous in a manner he was not before. Indeed, the monster's assertion that he "was benevolent and good; misery made [him] a fiend" (103) reveals how it is through these encounters, not prior to them, that he comes to be possessed by monstrous emotions and thereby becomes monstrous. Affective "intra-actions" make the monster monstrous, as much if not more than his "hideous aspect." Further, Barad's sense of the enactment of agency in "intra-actions" illustrates how affect, especially monstrous affect, is critical to the novel's articulation of agency.

Moved by the feelings and intra-actions that craft him, "the slave, not the master, of an impulse, which [he] detested, yet could not disobey" (222), the monster acts at the behest of his passions, not his logic, throughout the novel. Other characters are similarly moved; atremble with "rage and horror," Victor resolves to close with the monster in "mortal combat" (101), to act on a "rage ... without bounds" (102). And when Felix De Lacey finds the monster with his father, he darts forward and, "in a transport of fury" (137), dashes the monster to the ground. "Slave[s] of passion" (29), these characters are moved by intra-active monstrous affect. Monstrous passion, more than the monster or other characters, enacts agency in the novel. Monstrous passion shapes the monster as a diffraction grating through which Stryker's words move. And monstrous passion, the affect of queer fury, propels Stryker's language through the gratings in Shelley's text, mapping out specific differences that render not the broken promises that litter Shelley's text, but rather the possibility for substantive changes. One such change is visible in Stryker's description of her queer family.

Queer Kin, Queer Fury

In the journal segment of her piece, dated February 18, 1993, Stryker tells a story of birth rooted in queer kinship. Wondering “what the hospital staff thought of our little tribe swarming all over the delivery room,” she delineates an alternate family structure: “Stephanie, the midwife; Paul, the baby’s father” (250) – “a pierced, tattooed, purple-haired punk fag anarchist who helped his dyke friend get pregnant” (253) – “Kim’s sister Gwen; my son Wilson and me; and the two other women who make up our family, Anne and Heather.” A “queer family” that falls outside the normative heterosexual matrix, Stryker’s “little tribe” (250) reveals kinship not unlike that envisioned by the monster: cemented through the bonds of love, affection and the birth of Denali, their child.

However, Stryker’s birth experience diffracts the monster’s sense of kinship, for it gives her a rebirth, augmenting the sense of nonheterosexual generation so critical to *Frankenstein*. We witness the beginning of this rebirth in the “Journal” section of her piece, in which Stryker describes how the process leading up to the birth of her daughter overwhelms her with feelings of alienation. She writes: “I participated, step by increasingly intimate step, in the ritual transformation of consciousness of the birth of her daughter,” using “her” to refer to her partner, Kim. Stryker’s words – Kim’s daughter, not “my daughter” – reflect how, in spite of the intimacy of the process they all undertake, she feels distanced. Noting that “birth rituals work to prepare the self for a profound opening, an opening as psychic as it is corporeal” (250), Stryker finds herself at a loss. Her sense of her body contradicts this kind of opening: “I can’t even bleed

without a wound, and yet I claim to be a woman” (251). While she too wants to experience this opening, the precursor to an augmented family, she stalls at her body’s limits: “My body left me hanging” (250).

Stryker turns to language to perform her own conclusion to the birth ritual. “Now everything in me flowed out, moving up from inside and out through my throat, my mouth because these things could never pass between the lips of my cunt” (250). This shift, from physical to material-semiotic, reveals how when her sense of her body, her materiality, inhibits the proximity she wants to develop, Stryker uses another opening and another form to let out the “vital energy” that “wouldn’t discharge” any other way (250). And because the birth ritual Stryker cannot achieve bodily also enacts the closeness of kinship, her shift to language moves her beyond the impasse of her body and gives her a deeper connection with her queer family.

Like the monster’s, Stryker’s language is impelled by anger. However, her anger comes from specifically transgender experiences of frustration and exclusion. She posits:

I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like 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. (245)

Noting that she lives “daily with the consequences of medicine’s definition of [her] identity as an emotional disorder,” a definition that entails an “official pathologization” which can make her own words sound like “the confused ranting of a diseased mind,” Stryker describes her transgender rage:

Like the monster, the longer I live in these conditions, the more rage I harbor.
Rage colors me as it presses in through the pores of my skin, soaking in until it
becomes the blood that courses through my beating heart. It is a rage bred by the
necessity of existing in external circumstances that work against my survival.
(249)

Echoing the monster's feeling of being "bourne away by ... feelings of revenge and
hatred" (Shelley 140), Stryker's rage resonates with the affective intra-actions and agential
fury of Shelley's book. Stryker's rage transmutes her sadness and frustration about
childbirth, her bodily limits, and her experiences of transgender abjection through the
diffraction gratings of kinship and monstrosity in *Frankenstein*, so that her rage changes,
so that it comes out into words that delineate what she terms "yet another rage within"
(249).

Becoming Monstrous, Unbecoming Subject

Spoken out loud in the original performance of her piece, the language Stryker's
rage pushes out through the two lips of her mouth takes the forms of poetry and theory.
Both forms give voice to what had previously been silent. First, the poetry that Stryker
uses for her rebirth:

Rage
gives me back my body
as its own fluid medium
...
Rage constitutes me in my primal form.
It throws my head back
pulls my lips back over my teeth
opens my throat
and rears me up to howl: and no sound dilutes
the pure quality of my rage

No sound
exists
in this place without language
my rage is a silent raving

Rage
throws me back at last
into this mundane reality
in this transfigured flesh
that aligns with the power of my Being.

In birthing my rage,
my rage has rebirthed me. (252)

The “silent raving” Stryker describes becomes loud and public in this moment of her piece. Anger she had quashed, like Frankenstein’s intended, Elizabeth, who changes the subject to avoid melancholy matters, emerges in her words here. She undoes the silence of these feelings, which come from “a place without language” (252), by speaking them in this performance and, later, publishing them. Her rebirth in this moment pushes out through her mouth and her pen that which, prior to that moment, she could not say.

We can also see how this anger, by throwing Stryker into “this transfigured flesh,” allows Stryker an intimacy with herself, her body, which counters her feelings of alienation and abjection. Initially her “primal form,” her flesh and her being are her rage, no longer at a remove from one another. Through the process of returning to “mundane reality,” her body comes into alignment with the “power of [her] being” (252); she is no longer “left hanging” (250) by her sense of her physical being. In this sense, her rage-fueled words augment Frankenstein’s monster’s experience of becoming-monstrous through angry affect, for she takes up his anger and transmutes it by allowing it to push

her through another form of generation, another birth, a rebirth. In this moment, Stryker's monstrous rage speaks where there used to be no language, and gives her flesh alignment where there used to be distance and frustration.

The rage that throws Stryker into her flesh not only gives voice to feelings she was unable to express before, but also understandings. We see this in Stryker's development of specifically transgender theory following her writing of her rebirth. In this portion of her writing, she takes up the sense of materiality incipient in her poetry – flesh made words and words made flesh – in order to analyze the ways that her feelings and her body challenge the larger social order. She begins by elucidating the role of subjectivity in transgender experiences.

For Stryker, transgender rage “is located at the margin of subjectivity and the limit of signification” (253). It “enables the establishment of subjects in new modes, regulated by different codes of intelligibility ... by mobilizing gendered identities and rendering them provisional, open to strategic development and occupation” (253). Stryker's queer fury as transgender fury pushes her to speak her disidentification with gendered norms and to name ways to become differently legible in spite of those strictures. This fury, affect at its most material, gives Stryker new language, words she lacked before, through which she can explore a mode of becoming that allows bodies to intra-act differently with gender.

The sense of subjectivity and agency Butler delineates clarifies the change wrought by Stryker's queer fury. Writing about the relationship between a self, norms, and intelligibility, Butler notes, “if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set

of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred.” This desire for escape is complicated by “the ways in which I am done by norms,” for then “the possibility of my persistence as an ‘I’ depends on my being able to do something with what is done with me” (*Undoing Gender* 3). And there’s the rub:

As a result, the “I” that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them. This is not easy, because the “I” becomes, to a certain extent unknowable, threatened with unviability, with becoming undone altogether, when it no longer incorporates the norm in such a way as to make this “I” fully recognizable. (3)

This sense of being done by norms while trying to distance oneself from them produces agency “riven with paradox.” Butler argues, “if I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose” (3). The transgender theory that Stryker’s rage produces reconfigures subjectivity and eludes the paradox Butler describes.

The theoretical language Stryker’s rage engenders expresses a new understanding of the kinds of resistances available to specifically transgender subjectivities. By articulating experiences of “different codes of intelligibility” (253), Stryker analyses what she saw but could not adequately interpret before: the ways that specifically transgender fury can push those who live it to disregard norms, to disidentify with them, to reorganize their modes of being by incorporating the affect that comes from encounters with a hostile world, from an “outside force,” and bringing it within to the point where it transforms. Stryker’s understanding of this potential in transgender fury disrupts Butler’s sense of a paradox-riven agency, for her sense of the way that affect alters subjectivity

defies the structural divisions between inner/outer with which Butler's subject struggles. This affect diffracts through the gratings of kinship, monster, human, and gender in Shelley's novel, unearthing a new monstrosity.

It bears mentioning that the moment when Stryker begins to develop this new understanding begins immediately after her daughter's birth. She describes her need to "stop and theorize" following the short sentence uttered in the hospital delivery room, "It's a girl." This short sentence is the fuse that joins Stryker's confusion about her own need for a birth experience with her lived history of specifically transgender rage. For Stryker, this sentence marks "the non-consensuality of the baby's gendering" by transforming the baby's "flesh into a useful artifact," by making matter have meaning. The "phallogocentric language" of this sentence is "the scalpel that defines our flesh." And stuck for a moment "between the pains of two violations, the mark of gender and the unlivability of its absence," Stryker turns, again, to language. While she sees in it a the "Law of the Father" (253), and while she knows that she cannot escape language, she comes to realize that she can move through it differently, changing it from scalpel to medium.

Writing, "perhaps if I move furiously enough, I can deform it in my passing to leave a trace of my rage" (253), Stryker follows her emergent understanding of the resistance made possible by transgender fury with a sense of how this resistance can extend to reconfigure the join between bodies and language. She comes to see how her furious movement has the potential to transform language itself into a medium that can be deformed. This sensibility underscores the multiple diffraction gratings through which

Stryker's words move through in *Frankenstein*. This shift in language—from seeing it as a “godlike science” useful for persuasive orations to something that one can bodily reconfigure to push against the larger social order—marks language itself as an important diffraction grating through which Stryker's words map a constructive interference pattern. Stryker's experience of queer kinship, already closer in affective proximity to a family than the voyeuristic monster, is transformed by the movement of her rage through *Frankenstein* into something that makes her closer to herself and counters the distance Kim's birth makes her feel. And while the monster, like Stryker, becomes monstrous through affective intra-actions, Stryker takes these intra-actions further by letting this affect from outside couple with a “rage within,” driving her to give words to things she couldn't say before and produce theories she hadn't been able to express before. And when Stryker gives voice to these feelings and new understandings, she not only counters the silencing and containment of women in *Frankenstein*, but also makes gender itself something that can evince monstrosity by acting as the fulcrum transgender people can utilize to challenge a normative social order. In this manner, Stryker's birth by rage maps out multiple constructive interference patterns with *Frankenstein*, moving through the gratings of kinship, language, gender, and monster in Shelley's text to convey specific differences that, together, engender a different mode of being for Stryker, one that pushes back at a world that never chose her, but must make space and place for her nonetheless.

Nature, Science, Humans, and De(con)structive Interference

The furious affect that pushes Stryker's words through the gratings in Shelley's text produces an array of patterns, and in addition to the constructive interference patterns I have outlined, there is a notable area of non-constructive interference: the human. While the human in Shelley's text contains the monstrous, Stryker opposes human and monster:

Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like 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. (245)

Stryker's refrain of "like the monster" communicates a sense of mirroring, but the "human" in *Frankenstein* encompasses monstrous through both juridico-moral actions and the traversal of the life/death boundaries. Stryker's "human" opposes that of Shelley's novel.

Writing of the need for transgender activists to embrace and reclaim terms such as "monster," "creature," and "unnatural," Stryker notes that "a creature, after all, in the dominant tradition of Western European culture, is nothing other than a created being, a made thing." Moving into the second person, she states: "the affront you humans take at being called a 'creature' results from the threat the term poses to your status as 'lords of creation,' beings elevated above mere material existence" (246). Finding no shame "in acknowledging [her] egalitarian relationship with non-human material Being; everything emerges from the same matrix of possibilities" (247), Stryker contests this hierarchy. While in Shelley's novel, the human's others, monstrous through the traversal of the divisions between animated and lifeless, are contained within the human, Stryker divides

human and non-human through creature vs. creator and elevates the denigrated term. She invites her readers to “risk abjection and flourish” as she has (247). As the abject is that which is jettisoned from the self, radically excluded, according to Julia Kristeva, “death infecting life” (232), Stryker’s invitation crosses the border she envisions but does not break it. Indeed, because abjection rests on a structural division of inner from outer, the non-human the reader is invited to become marks the constitutive outside of the human. In this sense, Stryker’s words move through Shelley’s human and cancel out its monstrous potential by marking human and non-human as structurally divided, the one necessary to demarcate where the other ends.

You, me, and the space of reading

Stryker’s “you humans” also points to the location her words map into after moving through the diffraction gratings of Shelley’s text: the reader, a figure critical to both texts. *Frankenstein*, as an epistolary novel, makes unique use of its readers. As Lorri Nandrea points out, the reader of *Frankenstein*, unlike many of the novel’s characters (other than the absent Mrs. Saville to whom the novel’s correspondence is addressed) cannot see the monster. This inability to see the monster encourages the reader to “to sympathize with the monster, and also to feel pleasure in ‘hearing’ his story” (344), safe from the threat of his monstrous visage. However, this safety is dubious.

Burdened with the duty of piecing together the chronologically confusing epistles that make up *Frankenstein*, the reader must order narrative events and decipher their meaning, moral and otherwise, to be able to make any sense of the letters and to read them as a novel; the reader's role in this structure makes him/her/hir central to novel's meaning. In addition, multiple moments of second-person address pull the reader into the text, most notably when Victor denies Walton the knowledge he now regrets: "I see by your eagerness and the wonder and hope which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am acquainted; that cannot be" (54). These factors make the reader part of the fabric of the novel itself, for without a reader and/or the absent Mrs. Saville, the novel would not exist. In this sense, while safe from the monster's reach, the reader is formative of the book itself, making the space of reading one of active contact.

The reader's implication in the novel's formation renders contact inevitable, and it is not just that the reader can feel sympathy with the monster, but that, touched by his eloquence, party to the very existence of the book as a novel, she/he/ze is actively encouraged to do so. The monster's persuasive narrative gains significance here, for while we readers may be immune to other characters' attempts to extract promises—such as Victor's request to Walton that he kill the monster—we are too deeply implicated in the novel not to be affected or moved by those pleas. Sutured into the structure of the novel, necessary to its existence as a space of writing and therefore reading, we are pushed to sympathize, to feel for the monster's experience of emotion, to try to

understand the sorrow and passion that suffuses his story of all-consuming rage not because we are safe, but rather because we are unavoidably touched.

The O.E.D. defines sympathy for another as “the quality or state of being thus affected by the suffering or sorrow of another; a feeling of compassion or commiseration.” This sense of sympathy, sympathy for another, speaks to the kind of feeling *Frankenstein*’s space of reading attempts to evoke. Indeed, Walton, our letter-writer, when confronted by the monster, does not destroy him because of “a mixture of curiosity and compassion” (Shelley 221). Importantly, this moment happens before Walton has really heard the monster speak, and thus his sympathy is motivated not by the monster’s voice, but by the narrative suborned from its original, speaking character, an experience not unlike ours as readers of his letters conveying Victor’s story. The novel’s division of story and character and its subsequent emphasis on narrative alone seduce the reader not just to read, but to feel, to feel for the narrative, the experience of ostracism, pain, rage, and fury that the monster conveys.

While *Frankenstein* encourages the reader to have sympathy for the monster’s experience, the reader Stryker’s words map onto is asked for more than sympathy, for she petitions us to transform. Stryker’s enraged language diffracts Shelley’s writing, her words moving furiously through the gratings of gender, language, the human, monster, and kinship, their affect actively inscribing patterns of constructive and destructive interference, the motion of which pushes us, her readers, to feel not for but with her. Similar to Shelley’s writing, Stryker’s words emphasize a division between seeing and reading. Her shifts from prose to poetry to theory require her reader to piece together

her meaning for him/her/himself. And like Shelley, Stryker uses second-person address; at one point she states “Hearken unto me, fellow creatures” (247), and she concludes with a “monstrous benediction”:

If this is your path, as it is mine May you discover the enlivening power of darkness within yourself. May it nourish your rage. May your rage transform your actions, and your actions transform you as you struggle to transform your world. (254)

However, unlike Shelley’s readers, Stryker’s cannot occupy a safe distance –most of us, trans or not, share her world—and the touch of her text is more insistent. While in Shelley’s text the second-person address is nominally directed at another character, Stryker addresses her readers directly. Like the monster’s story, Stryker’s text reaches outside itself, but rather than move another character to promise to fulfill her desire, she hopes to move us, her readers. Her words travel through Shelley’s novel and reach towards us so that we too might become like her in kind, so that we might also be transformed by affect, so that we might also reconfigure how bodies encounter language.

This transformative and touching affect corresponds to another sense of sympathy: sympathy with someone. The O.E.D. defines this sense as “the quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow-feeling.” “Fellow-feeling,” sympathy with, denotes the kind of reach that Stryker’s text attempts. While we cannot have the same feelings as Stryker, she encourages us to become like her in kind, to move and transform as she has herself transformed. Her text’s constructive interferences with Shelley’s – feminist resistance to

gender, language as a tool for resistance to abjection, queer kinship that leads to transformation, monstrous fury that reconfigures language—threaten the divide of self and other, reader and text; motivated by monstrous feelings, her words push us to feel in kind. This transformation in feeling happens through fellow-feeling, through feeling with her. The transformation in our own affective experience Stryker encourages through her space of reading reveals how her language, in encouraging us to feel with her, intra-acts with us.

Stryker's fury thus transforms the contact between language and bodies not only within the space of her narrative, but also outside of it. She diffracts *Frankenstein* and crafts a space of reading that, while similar in its division between character and story, emphasis on narrative for its own sake, and need for promises, is dramatically different in that it fosters intra-active transformation. The specifically transgender theory that she develops in the text speaks to this intra-action. The nature of theory, in general, is to engender a new understanding of the way the world works, a new way to take in one's own experiences and make sense of them. When reading theory, we are being asked to re-evaluate what we know, to re-understand our worlds and to come to new understandings. Stryker's theory asks us to re-understand our encounters with a gendered social world, and it asks us to take up the anger and frustration these encounters might produce and, rather than turn them into a personalized sense of abjection, use them to drive us into action. Her intervention in the form of analytical language interpellates us into a new and different understanding of language, materiality, and gender, pushing us so that we might also be moved by fury and affect, so that we

might also transform the relationship between language and bodies, and so that we might also feel differently. Reading Stryker's words, we are asked to transform.

Stryker's text, in reaching and touching, in striving for proximity rather than distance, brings together the affective movement of transgender fury, Barad's sense of ontology, and the ontological liminality Cohen highlights. Meta-monstrous, the text not only elucidates in aching detail the feeling of monstrosity, but also reaches outside itself, a monstrous grasp into the intimate space between it and its readers that attempts to communicate the affect that moves and changes Stryker herself. By making language itself the medium of an encounter, Stryker's words push us, her readers, to emerge differently than we began, to change our sense of our "kind," to bring an alternate sensibility to the ties between bodies and language, so that we might be moved by a variation of the kindness of kinship to change in kind ourselves. Her feelings, her fury, in this monstrous form, reach outside the space of the singular subject, the lone reader separate from a text, mapping a pattern of interference into and onto its readers. How that diffraction happens depends on how much we are willing and able to feel with and be open to the kind of encounter that Stryker, and many others, seek. In that sense, this chapter maps another bright, constructive interference pattern through both Stryker and Shelley, and so I ask you to consider this monstrous benediction:

May you feel and move with the potential for difference.

Conclusion:

Mapping “Thinking and Feeling with” “Trans Affect” Elsewhere

Not long before I turned in a complete draft of this dissertation, I overheard a conversation between two senior scholars in queer theory. Part gossipy griping, part serious intellectual worry, their talk focused on the problems both had experienced with the “affective turn” as it surfaced in queer and, to some extent, transgender theories. They wondered darkly: would a focus on affect undo or counter other, earlier scholarship on questions of power, hegemony, and radicalization? Did this attention to affect turn us away from the core interventions of queer and feminist theories? As I stood to the side, a junior scholar writing on affect, I wanted to jump in and argue, to make my case and perhaps convert them to my own approach, if not the whole “turn.” But their critiques also addressed worries of my own, and hearing them in this manner – conversational asides rather than words on a page that, even as they stare, can also be put away for another time – stymied me. And so, I would like to take the space of this conclusion to address these concerns, to speak to the ways that attention to affect, specifically “trans affect,” is worrisome, but in a good way, because it is important and should not be ignored. I also want to use this space to think through if and how my own interventions, the joined “thinking and feeling with trans affect,” or the disjoined “thinking and feeling with” and “trans affect,” can and should be taken up in terms of other objects, other subjects, and/or other discourses that one might think with.

When I began this dissertation, I had pages and pages of what one might term “writing against” authors whose work I felt “got it wrong,” whose thinking I was in no way interested in inheriting. I engaged head-on writers focused on dividing transgender from transsexual, others who emphasized an inner gender versus outer sex, and still others who insisted on reading trans people in terms of whether they passed and the larger political ramifications of passing/not passing; in this early writing, I was intent on pushing against and/or superceding their claims. However, careful readers and caring advisors pushed me to think about what affect and “trans affect” *do*, and to focus on what I wanted my own writing to do rather than delineating what it was not. Over the course of many drafts, I became interested in thinking through affect and “trans affect” not as a riposte to other, earlier interventions in feminist, queer, and trans theories, but as a way to explore places, feelings, and understandings they did not, to search out Whiteheadian “new abstractions,” to think as Sedgwick urges “beside” or “near,” rather than “beyond” or “against.” Of course I cared and still care about the debates these other authors engage –issues of power, hegemony, racialization, class, not to mention debates about feminism, epistemology, and ontology—but I came to write to the side of these conversations. In this sense, the process of coming to write beside or near other interventions in transgender and queer theories made me realize that I needed to think in an alternate register in order to put forth understandings that could not be had or could not be reached through the lens of those frameworks.

This is to say, thinking and feeling with “trans affect” yields understandings that cannot be crafted by following the trajectories of earlier debates. Attention to “trans affect” allows me to focus on how trans people feel rather than what they look like.

“Trans affect” lets me think through changes to bodies that happen not necessarily through surgeries, or even legibility to a larger social world, but rather through and with a bodily sensibility. Moreover, focusing on “trans affect” does not mean that one abrogates theories and understandings that do center in matters of passing, power, and medicalized embodiments, for “trans affect” is not pitted against any of these formulations. Rather, it is to the side of them, an alternate register that reveals different abstractions, that points to another sensibility through which to attain distinct kinds of understandings.

But what of historical specificity? What about the cultural geographies that enable the emergences I read with? Indeed, as Raymond Williams noted, “structures of feeling” do not arise as transhistorical or transcultural formations. So how might I speak to the specificity of the “trans affects” I read with? Moreover, what are the drawbacks to thinking and feeling with “trans affect”?

On an intellectual level, “trans affect” could not have been conceived outside of the “affective turn” and feminist writings on bodies. It is only by following after work that focuses on experiences of embodiment, feminist and philosophical writings that draw from a Deleuze and Guattari-inflected pursuit of non-binarized understandings, that my own intervention even begins to make sense. But there is also a larger cultural moment in which to position this writing. I am working after Sandy Stone, Susan Stryker, and Jay Prosser, and I am writing at a time when trans activists organize marches that promote visibility and vociferously challenge the exclusion of trans women from lesbian spaces (and trans men from gay male spaces). Every day as I log onto facebook I come across a new blog (or a new piece on an old blog) challenging the accepted norms

for being trans, such that lively debates about whether *any* kind of medical intervention is necessary for transitioning, why the mainstream media should respect (and use) gender-neutral pronouns, whether the term “tranny” can ever be reclaimed given its history as a pejorative aimed at trans women of color, and more, have thickened my world view about this growing community of formerly seemingly invisible folks.

The debates about trans identities and practices that have shaped my perspective as both a transperson and writer also exceed the borders of U.S. trans spaces. For example, I have come to know a number of activists in Sweden who successfully challenged the requirement for sterilization as a prerequisite to changing the gender designation on one’s documents. Questions from the likes of Viviane Namaste about the kinds of cultural imperialism promulgated by the use of the term transgender outside of English-speaking, primarily U.S. and British-based contexts, have also unsettled my sense of the kinds of language that might do enough category work without effacing vastly disparate experiences that perhaps should not be grouped under “trans.” I highlight these interventions, both within and outside U.S. trans communities, in order to make clear that my work on “trans affect” comes at a moment and in a place where the questions I ask have become possible to formulate in the first place. The community Stone, Stryker, Feinberg, and numerous others have built has allowed me to articulate an intellectual endeavor not focused on passing, not directly invested in questions of hegemony and inclusion, but instead, oriented towards another register. This work, this sensibility, this orientation, would not be possible in a world they had not built, for it is only after their work –intellectual and activist –that my asking other questions and seeking alternate abstractions can even make sense.

And the drawbacks, you ask? As I have noted, thinking and feeling with “trans affect” is a particular mode of attention, a “cognitive and affective” habit in the manner Sedgwick seeks. It is not about the visual, and while what one hears and reads can and does reveal “trans affect,” the primary register that it works through is haptic. As a formulation rooted in touch and feeling, “trans affect” is not easily identified. In some ways, this is a positive attribute, for it underscores how affect is an alternate register through which one can come to understand what cannot be said or heard, what cannot be conveyed directly, what might be lost in translation. However, this alternate register poses a problem precisely because it cannot be seen and may not be easily located in what one hears. Indeed, thinking and feeling with affect, trans or otherwise, can engender good (and troubling) understandings, but/and thinking and feeling with affect is hard. In this sense, a critical drawback to my approach is that it is difficult to convey the sensibility it requires. Its non-visual nature makes the “partial perspectives” and shared understandings that Haraway articulates in “Situated Knowledges,” which are deeply important to my larger knowledge project, impossible to “see.” Similarly, deciphering the historical and cultural specificity of affects, trans or not, is not always an easy task. And, following from a concern that has been a driving force for this dissertation, it is hard to tell if someone is thinking *well* with affect, for there is no clear-cut way to discern good or accurate understandings from less than accurate ones in a register that can’t be easily verified by what one says or sees.

Let me circle back to this assertion: thinking and feeling with affect, trans or otherwise, can engender good (and troubling) understandings, but/and thinking and feeling with affect is hard. I want to trace the promises as well as the problems posed

here. What would it mean to transfer this mode of thinking in a manner that would engender good or good enough understandings of other others, of different and often effaced minoritarian subjects and/or objects? As Puig reminds me, there is a specific learning of distance to each intellectual project that seeks intimacy through learning to think *with*. In this sense, I cannot offer a formula that might promise good understandings for any and all objects of knowledge and knowers. What I can offer, instead, is a sensibility.

Let us consider the proposition implied by “thinking and feeling with affect.” What this asks of one and/or many is an orientation in the sense Ahmed suggests in *Queer Phenomenology*, an openness to and sense of being directed towards something (2). This something is the touch of feelings, the movement of emotions, which may or may not be expected. Indeed, this orientation joins positioning (one is directed towards something) with a different register, that of touching/feeling, such that an apt metaphor for this move might be an attempt to navigate blindfolded by relying on the textures of contacts (happenstance and deliberate) to show one the way.⁷⁶ But there is also the issue of the unexpected, what I have presented, through Ahmed and others, as the need to be open to that which one does not necessarily seek, or does not know to seek. Our blindfolded navigator, while oriented towards feelings, needs to be open to being moved and touched, such that his/her/hir orientation may derive from unsolicited contacts. This sensibility, then, is an orientation, but it is also about being open to being oriented. There may be intimacies to be had, but those proximities can be hard, as in the rough

⁷⁶ The Exploratorium, a San Francisco museum of science, art, and human perception, offers an exhibit, “the tactile dome,” where one can navigate in just this manner.

contacts Jess Goldberg makes. There are no specific distances to begin with, only the learning of them as one comes to seek certain touches and avoid others, as our imagined navigator might come to circumvent the shin-bruising coffee table in search of hands, arms, even lips.

An example is in order. Let us circle back to a curious body of scholarship that has somehow, in spite of my better intentions, made its way into this dissertation: animal studies. As I write this conclusion, I am simultaneously preparing work in another project that I thought, initially, had little to do with affect, trans or otherwise. This work focuses on so-called dangerous dogs, “pit bulls” and others whose lives are threatened by a congeries of factors –owners drawn to their reputation, legislators working to eradicate them, dog fighters who train them into a sport of dying, and more. Initially, I thought there was little space for affect in this work. However, research in animal shelters has shown me that not only do anti-pit bull feelings run high, but pro-pit bull ones are also prolific. Moreover, there has been a recent explosion in television media promoting these dogs through rescue and rehabilitation, the implicit message of which is often made through a reach towards viewers, asking them open their own homes and make these dogs part of their families. Kinship through kindness indeed. As I circle through my readings and videos, I am drawn more and more to thinking through affect as something that deeply informs the specificity of the relationships these dogs come to establish with humans. And this orientation has led me to consider the role of feeling in rescue and training projects. I am also interested in questioning the kinds of affective labor these dogs do. I bring up this example because it has made it clear to me that the sensibility I have come to embrace through this dissertation is not only helpful to my

work in other areas, but perhaps more importantly, has also led me to new and different questions that I might not have thought to ask otherwise.

Sensibility aside, I am also interested in seeing whether and how my interventions might travel when they are not paired. That is, are “thinking and feeling with” and/or “trans affect” salient outside of these pages? Let me take up the first, “thinking and feeling with.” To me, “thinking with and feeling with” suggest a kind of path that one can follow towards the lure of new abstractions. Open to affect in its emphasis on feeling and not just thinking, this mode of doing and moving away or apart from settled distinctions promises understandings that one might not attain otherwise. There is also Puig’s insight, for “thinking and feeling with care” brings to the fore the role of care in knowledge production. A feminist inheritance and challenge, “thinking and feeling with care” strikes me as a means to establish deeper, or at least more careful, understandings of philosophy’s others, as well as those of anthropology, history, sociology, feminist studies, environmental studies, and more. However, even without care, “thinking and feeling with” promise an intimacy and proximity (at no specific distance) that might challenge the problems of effacement, foreclosure, and structural divides facing all knowledge practices.

And then there is “trans affect.” As a member of several trans-specific listservs, I have received countless emails soliciting my participation in research studies, virtually none of which are interested in how I feel (about the emails or about feeling as part of my being trans). While I am cognizant of the rather humanities-specific way I have conceived of and utilize affect (most of these studies are rooted in the social sciences), I find myself wishing that my thinking might travel to these unknown emailers, if only

because they seem to be posing questions with answers built into them. Which is to say, most of these studies focus on the very tropes I attempt to avoid –the sense of a wrong body, a rather unstudied understanding of male/female as they relate to masculine/feminine, a need to explain how one might go from being gay to straight, etc. These researchers are not posing questions in a way that might invite in the unexpected, they are not looking to or oriented towards countering the norms of the stories that I and we have all heard before. In this sense, I truly hope that my thinking on “trans affect” might travel to different fields and disparate kinds of academic studies, for it might prompt others to re-orient and, in changing the kinds of questions and contacts sought, it might engender different understandings and better answers.

There is also the question of the subject. In the process of this writing, I realized that the trans subject is an important figure. Who am I to take away or make less important a subjectivity that has only been recently recognized, and then only in certain contexts? Further, I have found it hard to write about “trans affect” without focusing on specific subjects –Brevard, Feinberg, Stryker. Yet, I persist. I read my writers through affects first, which is not to deny their subjectivity, or their subject-constitutions, but rather, to disorient, or orient away or apart from the matrices and sensibilities that make them subjects in any of the senses I outline in my introduction. Subjects are important, but my interest lies to the side of their constitution and inheritances. And so, subjects aside, what can I promise you as a reader of this dissertation?

As a reader, you might take up the key formulations I have offered in this dissertation, “thinking and feeling with” and “trans affect.” But there are also the promises of the authors I read with. While my theorists are important, and promising, I

want to highlight my trans authors because their interventions are not often taken as theories, only practices. In the writers who reveal “trans affect” I elucidate in my second chapter, there are a number of injunctions: to think about what exceeds one’s understanding of oneself, to consciously use transgressive feelings to shape one’s self and one’s social world, and to understand feelings as key to navigating and understanding our identities and our bodies. Then there is Brevard, who asks us to consider who we might become if we were to reconsider and renegotiate our relationships with gender. And Feinberg poses a hard question: can or should we deliberately subject ourselves to friction and risks by living in bodies and taking up lives that contravene societal norms? Ze certainly invites us to do so. And Stryker asks us to follow a similar, if different proposition, by soliciting our participation in her project of changing language and social landscapes with her furious movement. Following these invitations, I would like to invite you to take up “thinking and feeling with” and “trans affect” in ways that might also change your world, your being, your sense of yourself. I hope that this dissertation, focused through my own “matters of concern,” can and should change how you perceive your world and your place within it.

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