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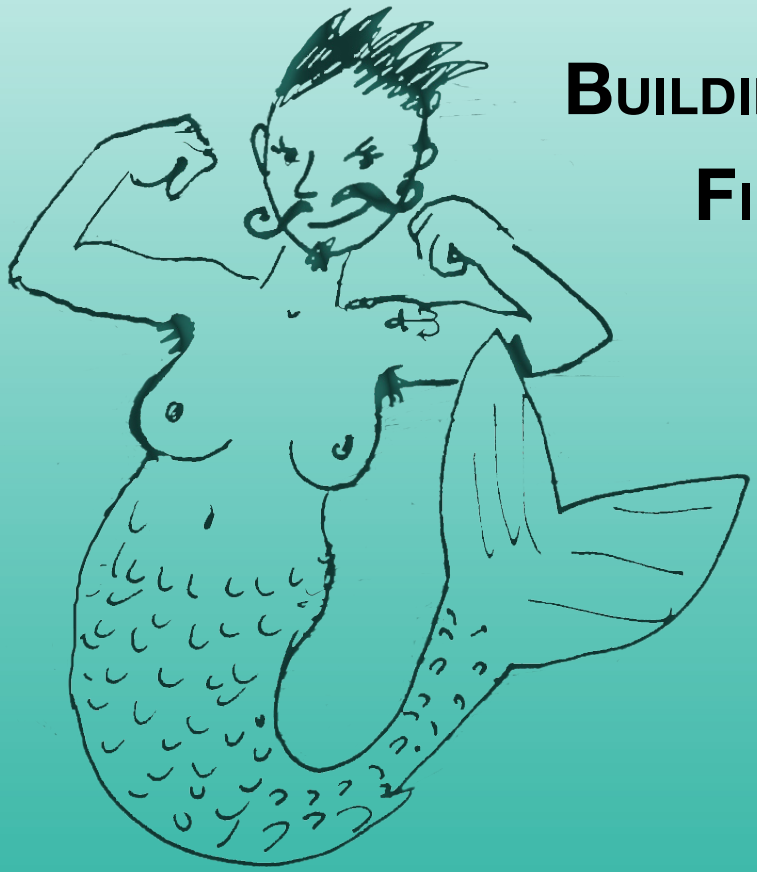
TransGender Studies & Theories: Building up the Field in A Nordic Context



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Editorial

Special issue *Graduate Journal of Social Science*

Transgender studies and theories: building up the field in a Nordic context

Guest editors

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On 18 November 2009, Linkoping University, Sweden opened its doors to what we believe to be the first international conference on trans in the Nordic region. Three busy, inspiring, challenging days later the 'Transgender studies and theories: building up the field in a Nordic context' conference ended. This special issue (bearing the same name as the conference) is an attempt to capture a flavour of those three days and to share it with a wider audience, in the hope of continuing the conversations and sparking new debates.

The conference participants and presenters included academics, activists and artists from many countries, from many disciplines and with a wide range of interests. The scope of the conference was kept deliberately open in terms of the participants we hoped to attract and the topics for inclusion. The aim in doing this was two-fold: to provide a space for different perspectives and experiences to meet in dialogue and, in so doing, to challenge the primacy of any one form of knowledge production on trans persons and lives.

The six articles that follow were developed from papers presented at the conference. They reflect the richness of the research and activism being carried out by and with trans persons at the conference and hence reflect some of the discussions going on. The strong, proud, smiling transmerperson which appears on the cover of this special issue productively connects the ac-

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ademic, activist and artistic contributions which defined the conference. However, it also points towards the creativity which runs through this issue. This creativity is clear not only in the papers specifically dealing with art and new media, but also in the innovative intersections and approaches which characterize the articles that follow.

In order to try and reflect the rich variety of contributions to both the conference and this special issue, the majority of this editorial will be devoted to introducing the articles themselves, the book reviews and the thoughts of some of our conference attendees on 'building up the field in a Nordic context'. Our closing words, rather than trying to definitively state what this 'field' might look like, reflect the hopes we have for the future and our heartfelt thanks to the people who have helped to make this special issue come to life. So, without further ado…

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This issue opens – just as the conference itself did – with a welcome from Nina Lykke, Professor of Gender Studies with special reference to Gender and Culture at the Unit for Gender Studies, TEMA - Department of Thematic Studies, Linköping University, Sweden. This welcome, which we have printed here almost exactly as it was given, explicitly advocates further development of a mutually supportive and productive intra-action between gender studies and transgender studies – apt words indeed with which to open this issue which we hope will produce many fruitful transdisciplinary conversations. This short piece is followed by six articles and four book reviews.

The first article is an essay on transgender children, written by Natacha Kennedy and Mark Hellen. This topic is not much discussed in academia or in more 'everyday' settings such as school, social work or health care. Kennedy and Hellen's research on the topic, which builds on a survey of transgender adults asked about their childhoods, shows that transgender children are aware of their gender variance much earlier than has been previously thought. Transgender children internalize a negative self-image due to their gender variance, and most children don't have access to words that can explain their feelings. This article underlines the importance of knowledge and support for transgender children, recommending that: 'as a minimum, schools introduce children to the concept of transgender people, so that transgender children are able to feel they are not alone and that their gender identity is as valid as any other' (Kennedy & Hellen, this issue).

This experience of othering, and the accompanying lack of words to express these feelings in childhood, is also articulated in the next paper by Austrian artist Anthony Clair Wagner. Wagner eloquently describes

the experience of being lost and then finding a voice through artistic expression. Wagner describes the powerful potential that can be found in the figures of the cyborg and the monster, and follows Susan Stryker's suggestion to imagine monsters as 'messengers and heralds of the extraordinary' (Stryker 2006, 247). Both of these figures (the monster and the cyborg) together with two developed by Wagner – the beast and the elf – are evoked in this article, and through art the message of future gender variance is embodied. The possibilities these hybrid figures offer are illustrated with examples from Wagner's own art as well as that of other artists.

Jules Tamàs Fütty provides a reflective and intersectional investigation into transgender theory in the third essay. Dichotomies are questioned and deconstructed, and both academic and non-academic perspectives in relation to transgender context(s) mentioned. This essay highlights and reflects upon the concept of passing and its paradoxical effects, i.e. that it simultaneously destabilizes and fixes power relations. Passing is also discussed in relation to articulating, silencing and othering, and highlights the underlying processes of power relations. As academics in this field we would like the following words from this article to guide accountable research on transgender issues: 'normalizing and silencing practices within Western research on transgender need to be reflected upon critically with regards to their practices of negotiating and authorizing meanings, which are both in danger of reproducing norms and silencings, but which can also enable subversions and interruptions' (Tamàs Fütty, this issue).

The next essay, by Ute Kalender, develops an intersectional trans-crip perspective. In doing this Kalender draws upon the significance of new reproductive technologies for both transgender people and people with disabilities. Issues such as forced sterilization, new reproductive technologies and accessibility are raised in this investigation of the underlying norms that operate within trans and crip approaches to reproduction. It is also stressed that each of these perspectives has ignored the meanings and consequences of debates on this issue in the other field of interest. Consequently, trans perspectives miss out on the problematic issue of neo-eugenics and the underlying norms that are reproduced through this, while crip perspectives may fail to acknowledge issues of sexuality and gender. With these gaps in mind, Kalender stresses the importance of integrating these two perspectives, and suggests some future directions.

In the fifth essay, Erika Alm's "Contextualising Intersex: Ethical discourses on Intersex in Sweden and the US", a comparison is made between the debates on intersex in the US and Sweden, highlighting

the difference in engagement with intersex advocacy and feminist perspectives. In the US there has been an explicit ethical debate on intersex rights, partly due to ISNA's (Intersex Society of North America) work. In Sweden, however, this debate has been rather silent. Alm also stresses the lack of a feminist studies perspective in the Swedish debate, which in the US has been influential for the intersex debate. The article argues that the debate on intersex rights must integrate perspectives from clinicians and caretakers, as well as intersex advocacy and feminist perspectives.

Finally, Tobias Raun develops an interpretation of visual gender transitions on the Internet, especially in video blogs (vlogs) on Youtube. He calls these 'screen births', as he understands the trans vlogs as both vehicles for the transformative embodiment of self-identified gender identities, and also as co-constitutive, as identity is expressed and emerges through the vlogs. Just as Wagner's reclaimed hybridity contains a message of future gender variance, Raun's essay on vlogs represents computer technology as a vehicle for global activism, and as such containing a transformative potential and expression of a global hope for future gender variance.

*****

The books reviewed in this issue also pick up on the transgender theme.

Nora Koller highlights the philosophical perspectives on change and identity presented in *"You've changed": Sex reassignment and Personal Identity,* edited by Laurie J. Shrage. The inherent difficulties and tensions between essential and relational experiences and expressions of the self, as well as between materiality and experience pose questions about what is actually changed and what stays the same in lived transitional experiences.

Leslie Sherlock reviews the book *Two Truths and a Lie* by Scott Turner Schofield, which is a written version of three pieces of live performances, and finds it as beautiful on the page as it is on stage. Sherlock also highlights its difference from other trans biographical literature, especially in the emphasis on embracing difference. She further highlights Schofield's discussion of coming out as both a transgender process but also coming out as a home-coming queen and debutante.

Natasha Curson reviews *Transgender Identities: Towards a Social Analysis of Gender Diversity*, edited by Sally Hines and Tam Sanger, noting that it contains a number of insightful and promising articles, but also some articles which use outdated or questionable terminology. The intention of the book is articulated as 'a reinstatement of materiality' and the engagement in experienced lives of trans people is, according to Curson, a theme for many of the

chapters in the book.

Eliza Steinbock describes the book *Assuming a Body: Transgender and the Rhetorics of Materiality*, by Gayle Salamon, as 'a fine example of scholarship that accomplishes trans- and inter-disciplinary engagement'. Steinbock stresses the importance of the book's focus on transdisciplinary perspectives of the body-concept in relation to transgender embodiment and materiality, through a transsectional use and analysis of trans studies, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, queer theory, sexual difference feminism, and judicial discourse, and their conceptions of the body. As the materiality of the body is discussed from the perspective of rhetoric, Steinbock also highlights the use of the concept of 'the body', as, for example, the lived body as well as 'bodies of knowledge,' in these different disciplines.

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The title of the conference 'Transgender studies and theories: building up the field in a Nordic context' was deliberately chosen in order to frame this event as a starting point, rather than in any way providing a definitive snapshot of what a 'Nordic trans field' might look like. Appropriately enough, participants came from all over Europe and beyond, bringing their knowledge and experiences to the table. We wanted to capture something of that same 'starting point', scary, exciting, hairs-on-the-back-of-your-neck-standing-on-end feeling that this polyphonic meeting produced, so we asked three of our participants (keynote speakers Gayle Salamon and Del LaGrace Volcano, and future directions panel participant, Lukas Romson) for their thoughts following the conference…

Gayle Salamon

It is hard to resist imagining Sweden as the displaced origin of a certain strain of trans history in the United States. We learn from Joanne Meyerowitz in her book *How Sex Changed* (2004) that Sweden was Christine Jorgensen's destination in 1952 when she left the United States in order to transition, and that a stopover in Copenhagen to visit relatives extended that stay so that she lingered in Denmark, ended up working with Dr. Christian Hamburger in Copenhagen, and never arrived in Sweden. It seems particularly fitting that Sweden, which appears in the trans history of the mid-twentieth century as a never-arrived-at stopping point, an infinitely deferred terminus, now finds itself as a new origin for a contemporary iteration of trans studies.

This conference brought together an impressive breadth of current research on Nordic transgender. As Paisley Currah and Dean Spade have recently argued in 'The State We're In: Locations of Coercion and Resistance in Trans Policy,' trans-

gender studies is currently in need of exactly this kind of 'grounded approach' which 'firmly locates in the research the particular social locations transgender people inhabit' (2007, 3). Such 'taking transgender lives as the starting point, the research question is no longer the riddle of gender or the particular gender configurations of transgender individuals; instead, the problem to be solved becomes the social and legal arrangements that structure gender nonconformity as problematic in the first place' (Currah & Spade 2007, 3). The specific social, legal, and policy structures that shape the lives of transpeople in and around Sweden were examined from a number of different, culturally specific vantage points.

Adrian de Silva traced a genealogy of the trans subject back through German sexology, noting the ways in which gender and sexuality have been entwined and separated in the construction of transsexual and transvestite subjects. Peter Forsberg examined the Church of Sweden's support for practices of eugenic sterilization, and the legacy of that support in transsexual legislation from 1972, which requires that transpeople relinquish their reproductive capacity in what Forsberg terms a 'corporeal tax.' Jan-Olov Madeline Agren and Kerstin Burman looked at gender in the application of the Swedish Names Act. Jens Borcherding and Lukas Romson examined the role of Scandinavian political forms in the lives of transpeople. Erika Alm used an explicitly comparative approach, looking at intersex in Swedish and North American contexts. And Tobias Raun's work on the function of video weblogs in the production and dissemination of transgender identity offered a global mapping; he suggests that on YouTube, the camera enacts a transubstantiation in which gendered identity, and transgendered community, is made across and beyond particular national borders, creating a trans community that is also necessarily transnational.

Though the conference situated transgender within a distinctly Nordic context, it seems likely that the impact of the research shared there will find itself also travelling beyond the particularity of that context.

INTERSEXtions– Del LaGrace Volcano

Transgender Studies, a new and exciting field in academia owes much to queer theory, feminism and lesbian/gay studies, which in turn are all entirely dependent upon binary gender categories for their existence. 'Identity politics' are no longer in favour with the queer elite, 'so last century', or so I've been told. However I argue that there is still very much a need for a politics of identity and visibility in this century, particularly when it comes to the last letter of the acronymetic alphabet soup, we call LGBTQ and

sometimes-I.

I stands for Intersex but could just as easily signify invisibility. There has been (and continues to be) a history of violent erasure of the intersexed, perpetrated in large part by a medical establishment that sees normalization (genital mutilation) as the solution. It has only been in the past ten years or so that intersex has become legible as a concept in contemporary society due to the increasing visibility in the mainstream media. The controversy surrounding the South African athlete, Caster Semenya, was reported throughout the world and provided a painful lesson about the racialization of gender and how much there is yet to achieve. In the early 00s there was best selling novel, *Middlesex*, appearances on *Oprah*, an award winning feature film, *XXY*, inclusion in popular television dramas from *ER* to *Law & Order* and numerous film and television documentaries, most of which were flawed and inaccurate but at least brought the subject to the table. However most people still have no idea what intersex means, unless you say the magic word, *hermaphrodite*. It seems we are only legible as mythological beasts, monstrosities or as useful tools in the fight to 'trouble' gender.

Simply put, intersex is anyone born with a body – or has a body that develops – outside of what are considered to be the standard norms for male and female bodies. Standards that have been arbitrarily sanctioned by medical and legal institutions throughout the world. While the controversies and tensions surrounding nomenclature within the various intersex social movements and between intersex and transgender activist groups contain elements of destruction I believe that these debates have a transformative potential if only we find the will to grasp it.

My contribution to the 'Transgender studies and theories: building up the field in a Nordic context' conference was a visual lecture *RePresenting Intersex in Art, Culture & Everyday Life.* My primary objective was to demonstrate how gender and sexuality have been regulated through fear of the 'abnormally' gendered body across the ages and to provide an alternative perspective that empowers rather than colonizes. The spectre and spectacle of the hermaphrodite has been simultaneously exploited for entertainment, from the freak shows of old to modern day tabloid tv and employed to create a class of people against whom all others are judged, i.e. normal vs abnormal.

The borderlands between transgender and intersex are minefields of mis-information and distrust, often due to the unfortunate tendency of some people (trans and non trans alike) to appropriate intersex issues in ways that do not benefit intersex people. Until we are able to understand that it is *culture* which is gender dysphoric, not individuals, it will

be difficult to make significant progress.

Building up the field of Transgender Studies in Scandinavia – a challenge – Lukas Romson

This conference showed that there's a great deal of interest in Transgender Studies in the Nordic countries. What many years ago was a field only for psychologists and physicians who wanted to know more about the 'freaks' and how to 'cure' us, Transgender Studies is now also a field for researchers in many disciplines, from anthropology to theology.

I think diversity in research, as in other contexts, is important for getting results. Therefore, I think it's important to try even more to broaden the field of Transgender Studies, and to build cooperation between disciplines. With good contacts between researchers from different disciplines as well as different countries, the field will grow stronger. To be able to do that, researchers have to lay aside distrust, both between disciplines and between the humanities and natural sciences. I also think it's important to understand that Gender Studies is not the same as Transgender Studies, just as GLB-Studies are not limited to sexology. New thoughts and ideas grow best when watered by many. That will be one of the biggest challenges, to see honestly and handle the conflicts that will come up when trying to truly work interdisciplinarily.

The other challenge is to find resources, resources for conferences, for a database and for publications. These things are necessary to spread results, to share ideas and for the results and thoughts to reach the rest of society. For me, as a politician and a transactivist, this last aspect is my main focus. In a complex society with contradictory wills, hierarchies and unequal circumstances, basic data for decision-making presented by researchers are a fundamental requirement for democratic decisions which can give trans people equal rights. By using research reports from acknowledged researchers trans people can win respect and be given a voice – on condition that we can find and use these reports.

This leads me to the final, and most important, challenge: communication with the trans community. This is important so that we can find and use the research, but also so that we can have a chance to speak up if the research is harmful. Regardless of whether you yourself identify as transgender or not, checking your terminology, thesis, methods, sources and so on with a couple of well-established local transgender leaders in your country is a good way to ensure that your research will not harm anyone in the transcommunity. In return, it's the responsibility of the transcommunity to give something back, such as information, sources and respondents, as well as to spread your final

work in the transcommunity. If you as researcher do not find any trans-organisation in your country, contact TransGender Europe (http://www.tgeu.org/).

Many of the discussions during the conference showed what great interest there is in cooperation over boundaries. There will always be conflicts and distrust, both between different trans groups and different researchers and disciplines, as well as between researchers and trans people. But we have taken the first steps, and we will go on forward, together!

*****

Final words and thanks

On that wonderfully positive note, we hope you find the articles that follow inspiring and thought-provoking. With texts like these to nourish future conversations, the emerging field(s) of trans studies and theories in the Nordic region will certainly be well-fed and watered.

The articles and reviews included here are but a taster of the wonderfully varied thinking and writing taking place on trans issues, both within the Nordic region and beyond. Whilst the conference was aimed at 'building up the field in a Nordic context', what the conference participants and contributors to this issue prove is that collaboration across fields, disciplines, languages, milieus and countries is a central part of building up the many fields of trans studies and theories.

With that in mind, we would like to thank all the authors, book reviewers and anonymous peer reviewers who put their time and effort into making this issue come to life. Special thanks to Gwendolyn Beetham, Melissa Fernández Arrigoitía and Caroline Wamala of the GJSS, and also former editor, Mia Liinason, who guided us through the process. The cover design of this special issue (and the conference photography) was provided by Claire Tucker, and the illustration of the transmerperson was a wonderful, unexpected gift from Ka Schmitz (www.ka-comix.de) – we really appreciate you both giving your creative talents and time to this project.

Thank you to all the conference participants whose presence and passion made for such lively discussions! Many thanks to Malena Gustavson, Anna Olovsdotter Lööv, Berit Starkman, Barbro Axelsson and Ian Dickson for all kinds of practical and technical support – we are so grateful for your help. Thank you to Vetenskapsrådet, Riksbanken and Linköping University (Strategig ruppförlikavillkor,Tema Genus, Regnbågen and Filosofiska Fakulteten) who provided essential funding for the conference. Special gratitude and love to Claire Tucker and Linda Tollin.

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from her conference welcome and for her support, without which the conference itself may never have made it from a dream to a reality.

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coordinator at the Centre of Gender Excellence at TEMA, Linköping University. Her future interests are within the feminist ethics and trans studies area and she wants to further explore the meaning of solidarity and (assymetrical) reciprocity in relation to feminist conceptions of justice and recognition. **(**ulrica.engdahl@liu.se**)**

Welcome to the conference *transgender studies and theories - building up the field in a Nordic context*.

Linköping University, Sweden, November 18-20, 2009.

Nina Lykke

As a welcoming address to the conference 'Transgender Studies and Theories – Building up the Field in a Nordic Context', the article discusses relations between the fields of Gender Studies and Transgender Studies. Following Judith Butler's critique of 'proper objects', the author warns against a construction of a binary between the study of 'gender' and the study of 'transgender'. She argues that Gender Studies and Transgender Studies should be seen as intra-acting and mutually transforming fields of enquiry which among others share an interest in trans-epistemologies, the construction of knowledge transgressive and transitional spaces. She ends with a comment to the autobiography of Christine Jorgensen whose MtF surgery hit the headlines of the world press in 1952, and to a family mystery which illustrates the problematic mix of silencing and sensationalism which for years characterized mainstream approaches to transgender issues.

Keywords: Transgender Studies, Gender Studies, trans-epistemologies, Christine Jorgensen's autobiography, 'proper' objects, transgender, transsexuals

In my capacity as Head of the Unit of Gender Studies, Linköping University, I am happy to wish you all a very warm welcome to the Unit and to the conference *Transgender Studies and Theories - Building up the Field in a Nordic Context*. I shall also use the opportunity to thank Katherine Harrison and Ulrica Engdahl who have put lots of energy into the organizing of this conference. The conference has attracted transgender scholars from many countries and contexts, and I really hope and feel sure that its main aim – to boost the building up of the field of Transgender Studies in a Nordic Context - will be accomplished. The

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overwhelming interest in the conference speaks for itself.

In particular, I am very happy that this event takes place as part of the activities of the Unit of Gender Studies. I think it is important to stress the importance of considering Transgender Studies and Gender Studies as intra-acting in the sense of the onto-epistemology of feminist theorist Karen Barad (2007). This implies that they should be seen as unbounded phenomena which mutually pervade and transform each other without necessarily collapsing into each other. According to this stance, Transgender Studies and Gender Studies should not be seen as separate entities 'properly' organized around different 'objects' of study ('gender', on the one hand, and 'transgender' on the other), but as fields of enquiry which share a profound interest in critical investigations of the diverse meanings and resignifications of sex/gender, gender transgressions, embodied subjectivities, gendered and sexualized power differentials and their intersections with other social and cultural axes of power (race, ethnicity, nationality, generation etc.). I agree very much with Judith Butler in her famous critique of the notion of 'proper objects' (Butler 1997). So even though I wholeheartedly embrace the emergence of critical Transgender Studies as an area of study that, according to the stated aims of this conference, should be recognized, supported and taken seriously in a Nordic context (as well as in other contexts), I would at the same time firmly argue that Transgender Studies should not simply take off as an area of its own. In my opinion, it should unfold in a close and mutually enriching dialogue with Gender Studies. I would find it epistemologically and methodologically problematic to cut the two totally loose from each other, and construct the 'proper object' of Transgender Studies as gender transgressions and leave Gender Studies stuck with the heteronormative two-gender-model. Along these lines, I like very much seeing this conference unfold within the context of the Unit of Gender Studies, and I welcome and endorse the constructing of alliances within the context of a feminist critique of gendered oppressions as suggested by transgender scholar Stephen Whittle:

> I wrote a few years back that 'gender' was an excuse for oppression.… Feminism is about a better set of values in which gender loses some of its power of oppression, in which separate and distinct voices are not only heard but also listened to, and in which a better set of values is followed. That is what we who are trans can gain from them – but perhaps more importantly now, it is also something we can give back to them (Whittle 2006, 202).

In addition to a shared critique

of gendered power differentials, I think it would be important also to explore further the issue of what I would call 'trans-epistemologies'. I share with many feminist scholars, interested in feminist epistemologies, a passion for the 'trans'-prefix as it emerges in concepts such as *trans*disciplinary, *trans*national, *trans*lation, *trans*versal – and *trans*-gender. I am fascinated by the innovative dynamics to be generated by transdisciplinarity (Pryse 2000; Lykke 2010 and 2011); I believe in critical feminist transnational analyses (Caplan, Alarcón and Moallem 1999; Lykke 2004) which overcome the methodological nationalisms or problematic universalisms characterizing much current scholarship; I think it is important to focus on boundary-objects (Haraway 1991; Bowker and Star 1999) which may facilitate translations between different local contexts (disciplinary, geopolitical, national, historical etc.), and I am a believer in what feminist scholar Nira Yuval-Davis called transversal dialogues (1997). As a queerfeminist sex/gender scholar, I also have a passion for critical gender-transgressions and transgenderism. Methodologically, I think it is interesting to take these trans-epistemologies into analyses which locate themselves in transitional spaces – in between and beyond. The 'trans'-tool is apt for forging transition, movement, process, becoming. It is well suited for exploring and shifting boundaries. It might be used as a tool for producing hope and change for what Stephen Whittle in the quote above calls 'a better set of values', where entities such as for example disciplines, nations and genders etc. lose their fixed and policed boundaries. Against this background, I think it would be very interesting to compare notes on similarities and differences between the ways in which the 'trans'-tool more specifically works in the intra-acting fields of Transgender Studies and Gender Studies. I hope the conference will be an arena for such comparisons.

A third reason for embracing the conference is the way in which Transgender Studies – in conjunction with Gender Studies - fosters critical knowledge and politically sustains and expands the right to do gender differently. To stress the latter point, I shall end this welcome speech with a personal anecdote. The anecdote is telling for the way in which transgender issues in my childhood and youth in the 1950s and 1960s were shrouded in a problematic mixture of public sensationalism and private silencing. But I think that it at the same time stresses mechanisms, which also may characterize a lot of current responses on the part of the majority population to transgender issues and practices which seem to threaten the 'good old' two-gender-model 'too much'.

The anecdote revolves around memories called forth by my recent

reading of the autobiography of Christine Jorgensen (1967/2000), whose MtF surgery hit the headlines of the world press in 1952. The reading triggered half-forgotten family memories and a line of reflections on them which I will share with you because they are pertinent for the conference theme.

As the story of Christine (George) Jorgensen may not be well known to everyone in the audience, I shall briefly retell it before entering my personal story. Christine Jorgensen was from the US, but, in order to get the MtF surgery she wanted, she had to go to Scandinavia, more particularly to my home country, Denmark. Here Christine met a medical doctor, the endocrinologist Christian Hamburger, head of Department of Endocrinology of Statens Serum Institut (a state driven medical institution in Copenhagen). Hamburger supported Christine in the decision to seek MtF-surgery. In the autobiography, Christine tells gratefully about his support which included finding a hospital and doctors who were willing to carry out the surgery as well as helping her getting new identity papers from the US Embassy, legally confirming her transition from male (George) to female (Christine) after the surgery. When Christine's case became public knowledge in 1952 (due to a leakage to the press by a member of the hospital staff where the surgery was undertaken), Hamburger became widely internationally known as a doctor who would help transsexuals.

My personal relation to this iconic story is that I knew Hamburger, Christine's doctor, pretty well when I was a child and teenager. He was my stepfather's boss, and occasionally I and my family took part in social events with Hamburger and his wife. My stepfather was, like Hamburger, a medical doctor and an endocrinologist. Soon after his medical exam in the early 1950s, my stepfather got a job at the Department of Endocrinology at Statens Serum Institut in Copenhagen, a job which he stayed in until his death in 1975. At more or less the same time, in 1953 (when I was four years old), my stepfather and my mother married each other. I do not recall exactly when I first heard the story of Christine Jorgensen, but it was, indeed, many years before I became aware of the connection to Christian Hamburger and my stepfather's workplace. In fact, this latter connection did not become clear to me until I as part of my current research project on pro-sex feminism stumbled over Christine Jorgensen's autobiography in a feminist sex shop in New York.

The reading of the autobiography prompted me to see my stepfather in a somewhat new light. I never really liked him. He was rather patriarchal – a typical father of the 1950s who left all the care work to my mother who, like him, had a full time job as a medical doctor. Probably, I was also oedipally jealous of him:

by all means the guy courted my beloved mother whom I had had for myself until I was four years old. So in many ways I remember him as a rather annoying and disturbing person. But the reading of Christine Jorgensen's autobiography and the link to Christian Hamburger and my stepfather's workplace set new reflections in motion.

During the 1960s, my stepfather started drinking so heavily that he more or less jeopardised his medical career. It has always been somewhat obscure to me and to my little sister and brother why he ended up like this, but I do also believe that the life of parents will – and should – always include secrets which the children will never grasp. Nevertheless, a new perspective on this old family mystery came to my mind, when I read the Jorgensen-autobiography. I remembered how my stepfather, when he was drunk, liked to provoke our middle-class neighbourhood by walking up and down the suburban street where we lived wearing a wig that my mother had bought when she lost her hair due to cancer treatment. I think that the provocative act of publicly wearing a woman's wig gave my stepfather an ambivalent pleasure. He claimed to do it as an angry and ironic act of miming young men from the hippie and students' movements who by that time (end of the 1960s) had grown their hair long as a protest amongst others against the kind of hegemonic, middle class patriarchal family values which my step father cherished. Conservative as my step father was, he hated the flourishing hippie and youth movements, and the mimetic gesture of wearing a woman's wig was meant to show the youth how ridiculously he thought they performed. But, in retrospect, I see the gesture as more multi-layered than this. I tend to think that my step father's wig wearing should also be interpreted as his entering into a transitional space, where a transgressive mode of doing gender momentarily made it possible for him to escape the rigid narratives of hegemonic and patriarchal masculinity with which he was brought up, but which did not fit him too well. The wig wearing was a temporary move for my step father, and he never succeeded in going further beyond binary gender and hegemonic masculinity than these modest experiments with transgenderism even though he for years had been part of a workplace where transgenderism, in fact, was a public issue.

The personal moral of the story is this: had my step father gone further in his gender transgressions, I believe that he would have ended up as an overall much happier and less authoritarian person who I probably would have liked much better than the utterly bitter, angry and annoyed man I knew. The more general moral is that since the mentioned mixture of public sensationalism and private silencing of transgender issues which characterized the 1950s

and 1960s in many ways seem to be still alive and kicking today, it is to be hoped that the emergent field of critical Transgender Studies - in conjunction with Gender Studies - can contribute to a change for the better here.

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Transgender children: more than a theoretical challenge

Natacha Kennedy and Mark Hellen

This research suggests that the majority of transgender people become aware of their gender identities at a very early age. As such many transgender children go through most, if not all, of their time in compulsory education knowing their gender identity is different from that expected of them. Transgender children are characterised as "apparent" and "non-apparent", with the vast majority being "non-apparent". It is argued that their concealment and suppression of identity for such a long period can lead to problems.

This paper examines this evidence and goes on to examine the implications of this from the point of view of children's abilities to rationalise and understand their own situations and make sense of the conflicting pressures on them to conform to gender normative behaviour and to expectations of gender which they are ultimately unable to do. As such they may spend many years of their lives unnecessarily having to deal with feelings of guilt and shame. The consequences of this are likely to be substantial underachievement in all areas of their lives.

Keywords: transgender, children, self-esteem, epiphanies, school, exclusion, diversity.

Introduction

This paper is about one of the most marginalised and excluded groups: transgender children. It is not about confident expression of challenges to existing social normative gender practices, but about their suppression. It is about concealment, suppression, stigmatisation, fear, isolation, doubt and repression. It is about how transgender children exist in the real world and how this experience may affect their lives as adults.

Initially this paper advances evidence, in contrast to what might otherwise be expected, that transgender children become aware they are transgender at much younger ages than previously considered, and that they then conceal or suppress their transgender identities. It subsequently builds on research conducted by Kennedy (2008) about the age when transgender children become aware of their gender identities examining what these children experience in greater detail. Finally,

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the implications of these findings are analysed from the point of view of the social and cultural pressures experienced by transgender children and how those pressures can affect their lives well into adulthood.

There is still relatively little written about transgender children, and much of what has been written is by mental health professionals (eg; Bradley 1985; Zucker 1985; Rekers 1987; Bradley and Zucker 1990; Zucker 1990, Green 1985, 1987). In Minter's (1999) review of these publications the reader is left with the impression that the validity of these studies is open to question as it appears that the ultimate objective of much of this research into Gender Identity 'Disorder' (American Psychiatric Association 2000, 535) in children is to legitimise the "prevention" or "elimination" of what is judged socially unacceptable gender-transgressive behaviour. Additionally, since these studies were apparently carried out with children referred for treatment by parents there may be concerns regarding validity associated with selection of participants.

Much of what has been written outside the sphere of psychiatry seems to suggest that transgender children are very rare. This was the conclusion of some participants in one case study (Hinton 2009, 77). Here, the experiences of 'J', a female–to-male (FTM) transgender child, during primary school and the early part of his secondary school career were documented, and the actions of his schools observed. In this case, the local Inspector of Equality and Diversity could find no instances of literature or guidance relating to very young transgender children:

> I contacted a range of national bodies … the Equal Opportunities Commission, the DfES and transgender agencies. None of them were able to give a clear lead. The youngest age I managed to find official information about was 16. (Hinton 2009, 77)

Individuals involved with these cases could be forgiven for thinking that transgender children are not only very rare but unlikely to develop before their late teens. However, in his commentary on the above case study Stewart (2009) suggests this is not the case, and that there are likely to be children who are less confident than J in coming out to others. Indeed, Hellen (2009) goes further, suggesting that there are two categories of transgender children (*apparent* and *non-apparent)*, and consequently that the participants' observations in Hinton's study should be reinterpreted as suggesting that *apparent* transgender children are relatively rare. This case study showed that a female-to-male transgender child who was very sure about his gender identity and having the support of his parents could be accommodated

within the school system. However, this clearly only applies to *apparent* transgender children. Evidence presented in this study suggests that the apparent transgender child is very much in the minority, and examines why *non-apparent t*ransgender children should be considered the norm when referring to transgender children.

In Kennedy's (2008) study, data was taken from an analysis of an online artefact suggesting that the average age at which transgender people become aware they are transgender is around 8 years old, and that more than 80% of transgender people become aware they are transgender before they leave primary school. The present study includes data from an online survey of transgender adults about their memories of childhood. There are many reasons for obtaining data in this way. It would be inappropriate to obtain this data directly from children since children become aware they are transgender at different times. So a complete representative picture will not be available for a given generation until they are adults. Additionally, there are ethical difficulties associated with obtaining data from children who may not be 'out' to their parents. Also there are likely to be sampling difficulties associated with identifying transgender children to take part in any study, which may result in an unrepresentative sample skewed towards apparent transgender children.

This survey employed a mixed methods approach, combining the collection of numerical data and qualitative data. Aspects such as the age at which transgender people became aware they are transgender were examined to produce a statistical analysis. The survey also examined participants' perceptions of their circumstances as transgender children revealing their feelings about what was happening to them. Data was organised to identify themes arising from these experiences and these were then analysed more closely to enable the construction of a picture of life as a transgender child from which implications may be drawn.

Data collection was via an online survey publicised through prominent online forums for transgender people in the UK between October 12th and October 19th 2009. The short timespan was intended to reduce the likelihood of malicious submissions by people who are not transgender. Approximately 80% of the responses were received within 48 hours of the survey's launch.

121 people took part; 103 were assigned male gender at birth, 11 assigned female, 3 not assigned a gender, and 4 declined to say. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to over 65, with the majority in the 36-45 age range (see fig. 1). Possible reasons for the relatively low rate of response from people in the 18 to 25 and 26 to 35 age ranges is discussed in the following section.

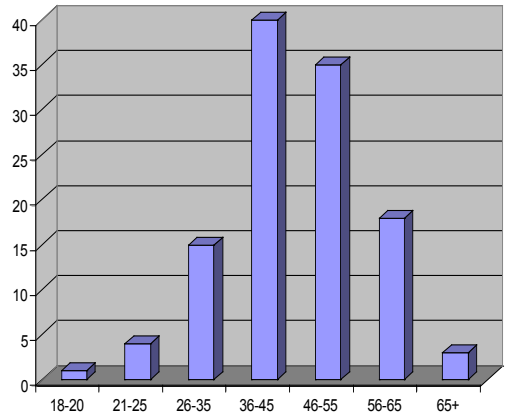

Fig.1 Age profile of participants

Participants described themselves in the following ways;

Transsexual Male to Female	31%
Transsexual Female to Male	6%
Transgendered	21%
Transvestite	21%
Intersex	2%
Mixed gender/ both M and F	6%
Others	12%

Table1.

'Others' included 'genderqueer', 'neutrois', 'crossdresser', 'female' 'gender fluid trans man' and 'not sure'.

Age of epiphany

Participants were asked the first time they could remember feeling that their gender identity was at variance with that assigned at birth (see fig. 2).

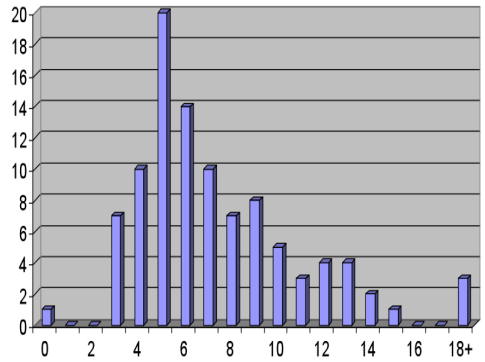

Fig.2 Age of realization of gender variance

The most striking aspect of this data is the clear spike at age 5 years, representing the modal average, with a mean average of 7.9 years. The percentage of transgender people who came to the realization of their gender variance at age 18 or later is less than 4%, with 76% of participants being aware they were transgender or gender variant before they left primary school.

This data is significant because it may, to a considerable extent, have been predicted with reference to Kessler & McKenna's findings regarding the ages at which children come to perceive gender (1978, 102). They argue that children start to understand gender identity between ages 3 and 4 and that this develops over the next two years as they also become aware of social interpretations of gender as an 'invariant' category. Additionally, Intons-Peterson's (1988) study suggesting that most children are aware of gender constancy at around 3 years and 9 months would also in-

dicate that transgender children are likely to start becoming aware of their differences shortly after this age.

However, these findings are not merely consistent with those of Kessler & McKenna and Intons-Peterson relating to gender identity development in children but also closely reflect the results of Kennedy's (2008) study, in which the average age at which male-to-female (MTF) transgender people first tried on an item of female apparel was 8 years old. In that study 84% of transgender people had done so before leaving primary school, which compares with 76% becoming aware they were transgender by that age in this study. A similar proportion in both studies (4%) did this after the age of 18. This is significant because similar data was obtained from two different methods of inquiry and, as such, adds weight to the data's reliability. This data is also reflected in Girschick's investigation into the lives of transgender adults whose participants described their childhood experiences in similar terms to those of the participants of the current study (2008, 51).

Common experiences

One of the most common early feelings about these epiphanies was that 'God has made a mistake' indicating that some transgender children felt strongly about their situation from quite a young age. When asked to 'describe their earliest memories of being transgender', responses appeared to suggest a strongly identifiable perception that something is 'wrong' with them:

> I used to dream that god realised he had got it wrong and I would wake up as a girl.
>
> I used to go to bed and pray I'd wake up with everything put right.
>
> Used to cry myself to sleep, wishing I'd wake up as a girl from about 7 years old.

Here, responses suggest that transgender children appear to be starting to internalise the perception that they are the problem, that there is something wrong with them although, at that stage, God appears to be blamed.

The following, vivid description of one child's first experience of school also suggests that for the youngest children, blame for their situation is not yet internalized:

> It was my first day at primary school and they told the boys to queue on the right and the girls to queue on the left. I went to the left but got moved to the right and remember sobbing all day long because they had got it wrong.

This strong emotional attachment to their feelings of gender identity seems to develop from a very young

age; in this case being assigned a gender which is different from what is internally perceived appears to be an emotional shock. Yet it is significant in the quotation above, that it was 'they' who had got it wrong. This source of blame would appear to change as the children get older, and it becomes directed inward, particularly as they come into increased contact with other children at school.

It was also evident that their perceptions of gender identities soon appear to make transgender children feel different from those around them.

> The earliest indication that something was unusual was that I had an interest in stereotypically male things. I wanted to drive a train when I grew up (age four) and I was obsessed with trains and how they worked.

> …a feeling of being different to the group I was supposed to play with, and a general why couldn't I be like/play with the same things as the other girls at primary school.

> it was just a feeling of being 'apart/ different'.

And the following, again vivid description, of the emotional response one child felt at being different from the other children around her:

> Shock and despair. It felt like missing the school bus and all the other kids waving out the back as it pulls away, knowing that I'd not be going where they were going.

These perceptions of their differences appear likely not merely to affect their feelings about themselves but also the decisions they make, most importantly regarding how they express themselves. These perceptions are also likely to inform a significant element of the internal conversation they have with themselves in order to come to terms with their circumstances.

Suppression and concealment

One of the most consistent responses to come out of this survey was the feeling that the participants needed to conceal their gender identities. As it becomes apparent to them that they are different, it soon becomes clear that to be different in this way is socially unacceptable and as such the most common response to this is concealment of their true feelings. When asked how they felt about their home and school lives it became clear that almost all perceived that they needed to conceal their gender identities:

> The overriding feeling was of needing to keep it a secret.

> Somehow I knew that what I felt was simply not acceptable - and I was frequently told 'boys don't do that'.

> feeling ecstatic about going to a party as a fairy, but then feeling so low at being told it was sissy and had to go as cowboy.
>
> I dressed in my sisters' clothes. It felt 'right' but I knew that I couldn't let anyone else know what I had done. I was about 6 years old at the time.

It seems evident that the children become aware quite quickly that their differences are socially unacceptable and that they need to be careful about expressing them. This appears to lead to them making, what may be from their point of view, the very logical and intelligent decision to conceal their gender identities. For some, this need is made even more demonstrably clear:

> Sissy insult ensured that I suppressed open female behaviour, but started cross dressing secretly from then on.
>
> When I first 'confessed' (around about 9) to some friends and my small brother, the reaction was pure horror, and I knew that I could never reveal anything again.

It would appear that most transgender children's social radar is good enough to tell, even from a young age, that being transgender is 'unacceptable'. However it is apparent, from the above two responses that even those brave enough to reveal something of their identities to others soon find that they risk suffering socially. In addition, this may be likely to result in them making assumptions about everyone; what is unacceptable to some is unacceptable to all:

> It turns out that I probably would have been [OK] if I had confided in my parents, but I didn't know that at the time and was too afraid.

The fear associated with this perception that they need to conceal their identities would relate to Paechter's description of how gender groups (particularly boys) police membership in childhood by denigration of the Other and any qualities associated with the Other (2007, 36). Her application of Lave & Wenger's (1991) theories of learning is relevant particularly in the case of boys. Although they are apprentice members of the male community of practice, there is little physically to distinguish them from girls until puberty; they possess little or no natural strength advantage over girls (and indeed boys aged between 9 and 12 years are often shorter than girls). As such the local community of practice defines itself by other means such as participation in specific activities, hair length, clothes and permitted expressions of emotion and preference, and also by valuing certain qualities in opposition to others. Hence, displaying

any behaviour, appearance or preferences attributed the other gender means ostracisation and exclusion from that group. It would appear that transgender children assigned male gender at birth become particularly aware of this from a very young age. The exclusion of transgender children assigned female gender at birth may take on a slightly different form since they seem to be considered slightly more socially accepted pre-puberty.

Acquisition of vocabulary and confiding in others

According to responses to a question about when participants became aware of words relating to transgender, the average age at which any vocabulary is acquired relating to being transgender (other than 'sissy' or 'Tomboy') such as 'Transsexual', 'Cross-dresser' or 'Transgender', was 15.4 years. This means that there is an average delay of 7.5 years between becoming aware of one's transgender or gender variant nature, and learning any words with which to describe it. This ranged from more than 10 years to minus 2 years. An analysis of the data shows that the age of awareness appears relatively stable, showing a slight decrease over time (see fig 3).

The age of acquisition of transgender-related vocabulary appears to have reduced by around 6 years in the last half century. Those attending primary school in the 1950s and early 60s are unlikely to have acquired any vocabulary of this kind until they were 20 on average, whilst those attending primary school in the 1970s, 80s and 90s are likely to have acquired this vocabulary on average around the age of 14.

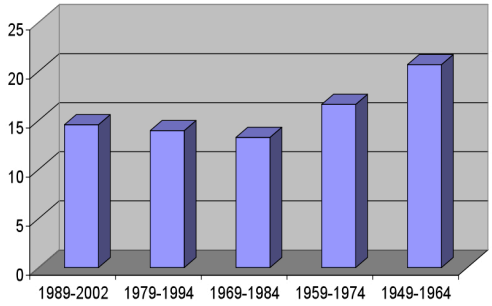

Fig. 3 Age of acquisition of vocabulary by date at which respondents attended primary school

It is probably too early to say as yet, whether the widespread availability of internet access for children will reduce this age still further. Sources of acquisition of this vocabulary are shown in Table 2 below. Here, the Internet is the source of vocabulary acquisition for only the same small numbers as 'Books' and 'Pornography' and is less than for either 'Friends' or 'School'. Given that this is a survey which covers a period during which newspapers and magazines have grown in influence and television has developed from playing a peripheral to a central role in people's lives, but which has only recently seen internet access become widespread, it is perhaps not surprising that its significance is limited. The fact that this vocabulary was mostly acquired from a variety

of mass media indicates that the process of its acquisition is probably predominantly an arbitrary one.

Source	Number
Newspapers/ magazines	26
Television	18
School	7
Friends	7
Books	5
Pornography	5
Internet	5
Popstars	3
Films	3
Parents	2
Advertising	2
Others	3

Table 2. Sources of vocabulary.

The implications of this arbitrary process of discovering words to describe oneself, and the delay in doing so, are potentially quite important; the consequences of discovering this vocabulary in circumstances in which transgender people are eroticized, objectified or ridiculed may be significant particularly if the individual concerned has suffered from low self-esteem as a result of any kind of transphobic bullying.

It would appear that the effects of the delay between transgender or gender variant children becoming aware of this and the acquisition of vocabulary may be particularly significant. It must be remembered that by the time they acquire this vocabulary they could easily have lived more than half their lives knowing they are transgender whilst not knowing any words for transgender. Responses to the question 'When did you first come to learn any transgender-related words?' show that this seems to have a significant effect on how they see themselves:

> I never had the trans words to use.
>
> I never put a name to it and wasn't even aware of the names TV, TS etc.
>
> I didn't know that I was transgendered or transsexual at an early age because I had never come across those terms. I remember intense jealousy of girls and writing a note to my mum saying I wanted to be a girl,
>
> I didn't know of 'trans' as a word or definition.
>
> I guess back then I felt a freak because there was no-one I knew who was like me.

Significantly, one of the most common responses to this situation appears to be that until this vocabulary is acquired, the child perceives him or herself as the only transgender person in the world. This is probably a reasonable assumption to make, given their circumstances and the information they have available, as it is likely that there would have been no other transgender

people around them, and that if there were, they would be likely to have concealed their gender identities as well. Yet acquisition of this vocabulary appears to bring with it the recognition that there are others like them:

> Reading about someone who did so in a magazine when I was 12 and feeling astonished that I wasn't alone.

It is apparent from this that prior to this she must have considered herself to be the only one.

Analysis of these responses reveals a surprising degree of shared (but isolated) experience of childhood for transgender children. This shared experience appears to be of feeling different, recognition of their social unacceptability, concealment and/or suppression. Overwhelmingly they feel they are unlike those around them, that they may indeed be the only person in the world to be like this, and that they need to maintain secrecy and conceal what they feel. As such, it would appear that the child 'J' who was the subject of Hinton's (2009) study referred to in section 1 is likely to be very much the exception rather than the norm. This is perhaps why those professionals involved with J's case may have perceived that his was a very rare case. The care, understanding and sensitivity with which he was treated, apparently by all those involved in both his primary and secondary school, and from other agencies, appears to be a model for how apparent FTM transgender children should be accommodated within the education system. However, the exceptional cases of these children may actually have the effect of obscuring the issue of how to deal with the much larger number of non-apparent transgender children who are still likely to be fearfully concealing or suppressing their feelings and true gender identities.

This is confirmed when examining the data on how many respondents told anyone else about this before they were 18 years old. Only 31% told anyone. Those told were usually friends or sometimes relatives, with one person telling a medical practitioner and one telling Childline.[1] In response to the question 'If you realised you were transgendered when you were a child did you tell anyone?' two-thirds of respondents told no-one until they were over 18. It also appears from the responses, for those assigned male gender at birth, that the reaction from telling someone, or someone finding out about them, was usually negative.

> Mother: She went into denial and her reaction forced me to hide my feelings for years.

> Mother caught me dressing and was angry and unable to handle it. No real conversation.

> Mother - told me to be thankful I was born male as they had better lives.
>
> Father. He tried very hard, I think with our doctors support, to take away from me anything feminine at all including my teddybear. He used to try to get me doing traditionally male things such as football. It didn't work though.
>
> My doctor laughed at me and said I would grow out of it, that I would grow up and discover boys and want to be 'properly' feminine.
>
> Took the piss so I didn't mention it again.

However, it would appear that, to an extent telling friends or siblings may have been slightly more successful:

> My elder sister actually found out and I had to explain myself to her. She ended up being very cool about it and we kept it as "our secret" for fear of upsetting Mum and Dad.
>
> My boyfriend said that one of the reasons he liked me was that I wasn't really a girl.

Generally the small number of participants who did tell anyone appeared to be older, in their later teens, when they told anyone, so it is likely that they may have at least encountered vocabulary with which to describe themselves and to rationalise their situation:

> I told my best friend and sometime crush that I was a transvestite when I was 18

In this case they would have been much more likely to have felt more positive about themselves, at least to the extent of knowing that they were not alone in being transgender. As such it is conceivable that a young person who has thought about his or her situation and discovered that there are others like them would be able to disclose their gender identity to others more confidently and in a much more positive way, and in doing so, increase the likelihood from their point of view of a positive response.

However it is particularly apparent that the majority of transgender children and young people do not tell anyone and it seems that for those who do, the result usually appears to be worse than not telling. The sense of isolation, in these circumstances is likely to be heightened. As such it would seem that the decision of most participants not to tell anyone appears justified from their perspectives and adds weight to the suggestion that their social radar is well developed. It is also likely to greatly increase the probability of their remaining non-apparent as well as, potentially, the likelihood of mental health problems as they get older.

One of the most significant results of this relates to Brown's (1988) research which has documented the relatively high incidence of MTF transsexuals in the US military. It suggests that, for transgender people assigned male gender at birth, concealment and even suppression of their gender identities becomes a significant feature of their lives from a young age until they are well into adulthood (Brown 1988). This suppression appears to develop into a more active attempt to conquer or overcome the feelings of guilt imposed on them by social pressures, in an attempt to force themselves to become more masculine. Such is the power of the socialization to which MTF transgender people are subjected that some of them go to the most extreme lengths to 'prove' their maleness, even to themselves. Although these people may represent those who try most intensely to suppress or overcome these feelings, it is likely that many others, whether transsexual or not, attempt to do this in other ways throughout their teen years and into early adulthood. The response of one participant in the 26-35 age group was particularly revealing:

> Age 25, after a breakdown and failed suicide attempt, I finally told a counsellor during a session. It was the first time I had ever spoken the word out loud.

This is one possible explanation for the comparatively low rate of response to the survey from some of the younger age groups; that they are still at the stage where they are trying to deny to themselves that they are transgender, or even to prove to themselves otherwise.

Expression of gender identities

Significantly, when participants were asked the extent to which they were permitted to express their gender identities at school, of those assigned female at birth, 18% and 10% were allowed to express their gender identities largely or as much as they wanted in primary and secondary schools respectively. This is slightly unexpected when the supposed acceptability of 'tomboys' in primary school is considered, and it compares with 45% being permitted freedom of gender expression at home.

The situation is, as expected, different for those assigned male gender at birth. Here only 2% of participants were permitted the same level of gender identity expression in both secondary and primary schools, and only 4% at home. So, while it is clearly only in rare cases where MTF transgender children could express their gender identities anywhere, the situation was slightly better for female-to-male transgender children, although even at home less than half of them were permitted to express their gender identities on a regular basis.

Of course this does not neces-

sarily mean these children did not express their gender identities at all; one of the features of a large proportion of the responses concerning earliest memories revealed how the natal males in particular started wearing girls' clothes or engaging in 'girls' activities in secret from a very young age:

> Around late child[hood] early teen years, cross dressing was frequent while parents were out.
>
> I spent a lot of time in the Bathroom playing in these clothes as a kid, no one ever found out.
>
> I dressed in my sisters' clothes. It felt 'right' but I knew that I couldn't let anyone else know what I had done.

This echoes the findings of Garfinkel about his subject Agnes (Garfinkel 1967, 285). Agnes, apparently being aware of her different gender identity from a very young age, engaged in a great deal of subterfuge to obtain her sex-change operation, which at the time would probably have been denied her. Her need to engage in this kind of action in order to obtain what she required demonstrates how she was able to exercise a considerable degree of agency and to come to an understanding of the circumstances in which she found herself. It is likely that most transgender children will, to whatever extent they are able, exercise whatever agency they have in deciding the extent to which they reveal their feelings to others, in particular others who they might consider to have the ability to harm them as a result.

Of course the physical and social circumstances of different children vary considerably and not all would have had the opportunity to engage in this sort of secret expression. It is also significant that, although those FTM transgender children did not refer to doing anything like this in secret, it is apparent from the data that in many cases although they were permitted to express their gender identities at home, they were not permitted to do so at school.

Implications

As a population, transgender people, especially if transgender children are included, potentially represent an awkward group, the existence of which could conceivably render untenable widely accepted worldviews of gender. The response to this appears, in some cases to have been attempts at the erasure of what, to some, seems to constitute an inconvenient group of subalterns (cf Raymond 1980, 178). Her idea that transgender people in general and transsexual people in particular exist as the result of pressure from male psychiatrists to become stereotypical females is seriously weakened by the evidence presented here that the majority of transgender people have

known they are transgender from a very young age and well before any contact with psychiatrists. It can be argued that this evidence appears primarily to support the ideas of Girshick (2008) that transgender people are probably most effectively studied from a sociological perspective that includes cisgendered[2] people.

Girshick (2008, 5) quotes W and D Williams; 'If men [and women] define situations as real they are real in their consequences', and problematises cisgendered identities, arguing that gender roles are a social construct in that the binary gender system currently in operation in western society represents an artificial cultural perception. Citing Roughgarden (2004) Girschick argues that the polarised and restrictive gender binary is based on false paradigms of gender, reinforced by selective, and culturally influenced interpretations of scientific research (eg Darwin 1859) rather than anything unnatural or inherently problematic about transgender people. There appears to be a tension between societal expectations of gendered behaviour and the way people are naturally, with some people unable to conform to gender norms. Since gender norms are probably more ruthlessly policed in the world of young children (Paechter 2007, 34) than at any other time in a person's life, this results in those who fail to conform concealing their gender identities for fear of being ostracised.

In particular this data on trans children presents a potential challenge to Judith Butler's concept of gender as an act of 'doing' rather than 'being' (1990 34). Are these children not actually transgender unless they are engaged in doing something which relates to that identity? Do the acts of crying themselves to sleep, praying that they will wake up as a girl or boy, for example, count as (trans)gender expression? What about the acts of wishing they can wear dresses, ties, skirts, trousers or play with dolls or trains?

Paechter's observations that children apprentice themselves into gender identities as they grow up, gradually moving from peripheries of communities of practice to centrality are relevant here. Yet if children are non-apparent transgender, it is quite possible they will appear apprenticed into a gender that is (wholly or partly) not theirs. As the data presented in the first section above suggests, non-apparent transgender children may still explore mentally, and in their imaginations, aspects of the gender with which they most identify.

This does not mean, for example, that transgirls do not wear 'girls' clothes, and engage in some feminine activities; it means that, where possible, they tend to do so in secret. This appears to be one of the main common experiences of MTF transgender children; in the same way that children reenact what they

perceive as adult behaviour in their play, non-apparent transgender children seem to do so in their imaginations, and, where possible, in secret. For them an element of the gender apprenticeship and expression is potentially still there, it is just hidden and normally does not express itself openly; their public expressions of gender being for the purpose of self protection and to prevent social isolation. The evidence relating to how many transboys are permitted to express their gender identities at home but not at school suggests that this may occur in a slightly different way for this group, in that they appear not to perceive the need to be as secretive at home as transgirls. Whether this is their own decision or because their parents are obliging them to maintain a feminine image at school possibly for reasons of self-protection is not clear.

Butler's conceptualizations of performativity and interpellation accept that transgender identities are constructed in the same way as others. Her reference to Althusser (1971) is pertinent here (Butler 1993, 121). Althusser's argument that individuals are always subjects within ideology in any society means that, as such, gender expectations represent the consequences of interpellation of newborn children as gendered subjects at, and just after, birth. As such this results in the child being compelled, from a very early age, to act in conformity with the citational requirements of its gender. Echoing De Beauvoir (1949) and Foucault (1975) Butler argues:

> Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment. (Butler 1993, 232)

Although transgender children are subjected to considerable and sustained pressure to conform to gender roles assigned at birth, what is most remarkable is that in defiance of this they still develop a transgender identity. This is particularly significant because current social expectations act to impel us all not merely to behave according to ideal stereotypes of just two genders, but also to expect ourselves to fit into binary gender categories even if we do not.

It needs to be recognized that forcing gender expectations onto some children can lead to them internalizing inappropriate expectations of their own gender expression. This means that some try to force themselves to 'become' a gender they are not (or perform a gendered identity which is not appropriate for them) and attempt to compel themselves to perform (in the case of MTFs) hypermasculine activities in order to try and 'make' themselves more masculine (Brown 1988). Transgender children appear

to be both struggling against their gender assignation whilst at the same time concealing and/or suppressing feelings which they realise do not conform to social expectations. Gender variance for these children could be characterized as performance of a gender identity which is not their own but which is imposed on them by adults and their local gendered community of practice. Yet there is evidence that, as a result of this imposition and subsequent internalized transphobia, many of these children achieve well below their abilities at school, leave school early, are more likely to self-harm or attempt suicide and are more likely to suffer from mental health issues in early adulthood (Whittle et al. 2007, 62).

The existence of transgender children, their embodied, actual experiences of being Monets or Turners in a world of Chiaroscuros, raises questions which can no longer be ignored or erased. Their secretive existence represents an important challenge on many levels, not least of which is effective provision for them within education systems. If a school system tried to coerce any other group of individuals to become people they are not, to regard an inner core of their identities as illegitimate, and prevent them from expressing their identities freely, particularly from a very young age, it would be characterised as barbaric. Yet it appears that schools fail to support transgender children even to the extent of tacitly permitting, ignoring, or indeed participating in bullying which forces them to conceal or suppress those identities. These things are allowed to happen daily in the case of transgender children, to the extent that most appear to be too afraid to reveal their identities to anyone. The pressures on transgender children to conform to a gender system which is unable to deal with this aspect of human diversity, and which obliges them to adopt inappropriate gendered expression, are so intense that resulting psychological problems appear to manifest themselves well into adulthood. As such further research is needed into the nature of transgender children's experiences in school and at home and a programme of public education established enabling these children to express their identities free from the harassment, erasure, bullying and ignorance which results in their suppressed and concealed identities causing psychological harm as they grow up.

In conclusion, one of the reasons why, in western society, the general population, medical practitioners, some academics and even young transgender people themselves appear to have come to view transgender people as problematic is probably the way they represent a threat to one of the most basic concepts, the gender binary, by which they have been brought up to understand and order the world (Devor 1989, 46). The existence of trans-

gender people undermines one of the earliest cognitive structures upon which children's views of the world are built. The concept of the gender binary has become so deeply embedded into the way we all interpret a wide variety of aspects of the world that challenging it is something that will inevitably be uncomfortable for some. Yet doing so is important, so that a section of the human race can live the lives they choose, free from psychologically and emotionally damaging pressures to be someone they are not. Consequently, it is recommended that, as a minimum, schools introduce children to the concept of transgender people, so that transgender children are able to feel they are not alone and that their gender identity is as valid as any other. This would also encourage other children to become more accepting of transgender people, not just in terms of their classmates but when they become adults as well. The human cost, particularly for transgender people themselves, of maintaining the chimera of an immutable and exclusive gender binary is becoming increasingly clear. The internalization of self-hatred, guilt, self-doubt and low self-esteem in childhood affects transgender people throughout their lives. Any education system, or indeed society which allows this state of affairs to continue, is neither fully inclusive nor fully humane.

Endnotes

[1] A confidential telephone support line for children in the UK.

[2] A cisgendered person is someone whose gender identity is the same as that which they are assigned at birth.

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On Elves and Beasts: an intervention into normative imaginaries

Anthony Clair Wagner

The Elf and the Beast are my artisitc alter egos which I employ in order to make visible certain aspects of, and reflections on, my trans-experience and –identity by means of video, photography and performance.

I began developing these non-human identities in my art while living isolated in the rural Austrian countryside. Only later on, when I learned about the many fields of existing transgender discourse, did I start to realize how my figurations eerily reflect certain aspects of Donna Haraway´s work (e.g. 'Promises of Monsters'), and Susan Stryker´s use of Frankenstein´s Monster as her voice.

In my paper I talk about how adopting non-human somatechnics and embodying the resulting creatures allows me to distance myself from the restrictions of our social understanding of what the human is. Further I speak about how it allows me to contemplate my situation in reference to the binary gender system and a range of somatechnics that are outside the performability of my transidentity. I also discuss the use of non-human somatechnics as opening up options of accessing and expressing transpower: the power that inhabits transgressions of physical, mental, and other ensuing restrictions.

My alter egos might entice us into practicing joyful resistances against categorizations within the cultural norms linked to gender, sex and sexuality.

Keywords: Queer; Transgender; Art; Monster; Beast; Elf; Human

When I first became aware of my incongruity with the sex I was assigned at birth, and the presumed gender identity I was expected to develop, I had no knowledge of any academic discourse. I was not aware of the iron grip that gender dichotomy exercises on all members and aspects of society until I was first confronted by gender segregation practices at school at the age of ten. Susan Stryker said that gender is like a 'tribal tattoo that makes one's personhood cognizable' (Stryker 2006, 253), and there, on the brink of adolescence, I felt myself to be unexpectedly stripped of one of the comforting unconscious bases of identity upon which our selves are erected. I found myself in free fall, like Alice tumbling down the rabbit hole. All the certainties and beliefs

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that I had taken for granted fell away from me and were revealed to be of less solidity than a Fata Morgana, a mirage. In the next nineteen years I learned to live in this zero gravity and started to explore the brave new world to which I had been awakened. I rebuilt my identity, reflected on my experiences in my art and got acquainted with the term transsexual.[1] As I transitioned over several years into being trans, I decided to present myself physically on a middle ground negotiable by both my society and myself. Once having performed the rituals on offer to ease my private unease with the accepted Real,[2] I set out on an effort to make some sense of the forces I had encountered. I started on my quest for the uncatchable White Whale of Comprehension in the rough waters of trans discourse.

I washed up on strange islands called medicine, law, society, tradition, binarity, and others. I began to educate myself and laboured to add my voice to the clamour around me. I found many treasures, and discovered some key aspects of this 'new' field of trans studies, aspects that I discovered eerily paralleled elements in my art, whose initial development predated my first knowledge of these aspects. Most interestingly, I saw that such parallels could also be found in the art of other trans people, such as, for example, in the works of two other artists, Hans Scheirl and Jakob Lena Knebl, who self-identify as trans in Austria. In this article, I discuss how the images from their work and my own provide ways to explore trans identities that productively engage with existing trans discourses. In particular, I focus on cyborgs, monsters and, finally, on the Beast and the Elf (which are a central part of my own work).

Cyborgs

The most significant key aspects of both Scheirl and Knebl's work and my own are a focus on the 'monstrous' and 'empowerment through difference.' This is perfectly represented in the figure of the cyborg, which I first encountered in Scheirl's mind-boggling film *Dandy Dust* (1998), and subsequently in Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (first published 1985).

In *Dandy Dust*, according to Stefan Grissemann, 'a split-personality cyborg, with fluid gender, zooms through time in order to collect his/her/their selves in a battle against pedigree obsessed family' (Grissemann; translation mine).

Figure 1. Hans Scheirl, Amanda J. Roberts as 'Hiller', 'Dandy Dust'. (film still), 1998.[3]

When I was 25 years old, I was struck by the extent to which Haraway's 'argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction' (Haraway 2006, 104) was elaborately realised in Scheirl's film. Armstrong has commented:

> Hans Scheirl is one of the transgendered artists whose metamorphosis has arisen from this [London dyke] alternative 'queer' culture. Dandy Dust, a transgendered/noize/splatter/sci-fi/horror-comix plot set in a planetary system with organs and inhabited by a dysfunctional family, is of cyborg origin. The film's hypercyclic narrative can be read from any point and gives play space to a number of combative personalities that mutate and evolve using non-linear strategies. (Armstrong 1999, 28, parenthesis mine)

Figure 2. Hans Scheirl, 'Cyberdykes in the bubble of the planet 3075', 'Dandy Dust'. (film still), 1998.[4]

Coming across another artist, especially one from my own country, whose work reflected a trans experience, was immensely encouraging. In line with Haraway's cyborg politics, which speak of 'the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly' (Haraway 2006, 112), the excessive imagery of Dandy Dust shakes our assumptions that only our own perceptions, in particular concerning sexuality and gender, are legitimate (Kuzniar 1999, 59). Scheirl discusses the 'time-space-scale narration' in his 'manifesto for the dada of the *cyborg-embrio*':

> The narration goes <u>through</u> space rather than <u>in&out</u> of spaces.
> it does that by travelling in the dimension 'scale'. Dandy Dust travels through the 'big' universe, approaches and goes into the 'small' universe, so far that s/he ends up in the/another 'big' universe & and can, of course, not discern betw small&big anymore s/he experiences space as something that changes according to h own movement, which can be of implosive, explosive, or scanning nature. (Scheirl 1997, 55)

I recognized myself in Scheirl's film as well as in Haraway's manifesto in the described boundary ruptures and the ensuing struggle over the issue of being human. The one who, by simply existing, transcends the boundaries of others will be seen as a threat and will therefore appear to be monstrous: 'monsters have always defined the limits of commu-

nity in Western imagination' (Haraway 2006, 115). The characters in Scheirl's *Dandy Dust* are monstrous cyborgs and the film itself is fundamentally trans. I wholeheartedly agree with Alice Kuzniar when she writes, 'what is so fascinating about Scheirl's universe is the way in which he thinks through the notion of transgender in order to extrapolate a new, somatically conceptualized filmic language' (Kuzniar 1999, 59). In my opinion, what Scheirl has done in making *Dandy Dust*, and what I am doing by remanifesting myself as an Elf or a Beast, is 'Cyborg writing'. Haraway explains:

> Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualism of naturalized identities. (Haraway 2006, 112)

Monsters

Figure 3. Jakob Lena Knebl, 'ich bin die anderen', 2009, all rights reserved by Jakob Lena Knebl, photo: Georg Petermichl.[5]

Another artist who explores the monstrous head-on in her self-portraits is Jakob Lena Knebl whose work can be read along the lines of Susan Stryker's appropriation of the story of Frankenstein's monster. Stryker identifies with the monster in her 1994 essay, 'My words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix' (reprinted in Stryker and Whittle 2006). In writing, 'she claims her own transsexual body as a monstrously powerful place, situated outside the natural order, from which to speak and write and act' (Stryker 2006, 244). For Stryker, seizing the tools consists of claiming 'the dark power of my monstrous identity' (Stryker 2006, 246). She goes on to say that 'words like "creature", "monster", and "unnatural" need to be reclaimed by the transgendered' (Stryker 2006, 246). The close up of Knebl's face [fig. 3], being distorted by hands roughly pulling and pushing at the features, is an impressive visualization of the forces and interests that are at work in the forming of an individual's identity, of 'all the violation, loss, and separation inflicted by the gendering process that sustains the illusion of naturalness' (Stryker 2006, 254). All people have to balance themselves somewhere between their true selves and their society's expectations. But those individuals who explicitly oppose these expectations may end up in a situation where they experience these forces as violent. The aggressive demand that one

conform can make the trans person feel like a monster, like the one who is too different to belong.

Stryker points out 'the inability of language to represent the transgendered subject's movement over time between stably gendered positions in a linguistic structure' (Stryker 2006, 247). I agree with her, which is why I, like Jakob Lena Knebl, claim the monster first of all visually. Knebl's taped face with the open mouth frozen in a disquieting sneer [fig. 4] is another way of confronting the audience with a monstrous truth most would rather avoid. We might sometimes lack the words, but by representing the monstrous, we invite the viewer first to feel revolted, but then to realize that an ugly face does not equal a threat, nor should a pleasing exterior be an invitation to relax one's guard. Beauty does not equal innocence, and lies like everything else in the eyes of the beholder.

Figure 4.

Jakob Lena Knebl, 'es geschah am hellichten tag', 2009, all rights reserved by Jakob Lena Knebl, photo: Georg Petermichl.[6]

Identification as the other, the transcender, the monster, seems to be a recurring personality trait among those who are trans. In a world, in a society, that operates on a heteronormative binary basis, anyone unable to conform to the mould, even after a determined struggle to be a part of this conditioned 'we,' necessarily ends up at the outermost fringes of this ultimate in-group of the majority. What is remarkable though is how many trans people and queers obviously seek out the power inherent in being the one who transcends boundaries, the one who looks inside from the Outer Place, the monster.

How does one get to that point? In my own case, I was raised quite liberally with regards to gender issues; no one forced me to conform to any stereotypes. I had a wonderful and diverse childhood. I got dirty building forts in the forest and ate ice-cream wearing dresses in the summer heat. I indulged my artistic interests, played with Barbie dolls, and learned how to punch and kick in martial arts classes. Only when I hit puberty did I realize that something was amiss. It started as a vague uneasiness about my own body when it began to become apparent that people are divided into two groups and everyone has to choose a side. After primary school, physical education suddenly translated into segregation, and I was left feeling like the kid who did not get picked by either of the two teams. I

did not believe that I belonged with the girls, but I was not supposed to play on the boys' team. The entire world seemed to need me to decide what I was going to represent, the feminine, or the masculine. And, once I had decided, I was going to be required to stick to my choice. Transgression is not encouraged. From all sides I was assaulted, pressured to admit that I was really just an unsatisfied girl, jealous of the boys, just going through a phase. On the one hand, I was told that I would just have to get used to being a girl; and, on the other hand, that I had to behave in certain ways if I really wanted to be a boy, that I would have to experience certain desires if I wanted to be male. I should not desire men because then I would be just a woman with no tits, after all, and so on. I was not surprised when some people implied that I was unnatural, that I was a freak. My own mother would use that expression when she finally had to admit that I was not indulging in a passing fancy. I could not understand how she, as my mother, could say some of the things she threw in my face, but, when I came to do the research for my thesis years later, I recognized her outrage in Janice Raymond's words which she could have been parroting. Raymond´s book (*The Transexxual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*) was able to explain some of the hatred coming out of the mouths of my assailants. However, in my mid-teens I was confused. I did not know whether I was fundamentally a boy, but I believed that if I was not a girl there was no option left open to me other than being a boy.

So how did one go about becoming a boy? On the one hand, I got lucky by being born in 1980 in Austria; on the other hand, Austria was still largely mired in outdated thinking on the issue of gender-transitioning. Initially, Harry Benjamin's definition that 'true transsexuals feel that they *belong* to the other sex, they want to be and *function* as members of the opposite sex, not only to appear as such' (Benjamin 1966, 13; original emphasis), had been applied in Austria as a basis for determining the right of applicants to submit themselves to sex-reassignment surgery. Luckily, the doctors who eventually decided on my fate no longer subscribed to this old heteronormative evaluation system. They mostly tolerated my behaving as I wished, without conforming to their textbooks. The long fight of transgender warriors for self-determination had deflected some of the unfortunate effects of Benjamin's work.

From a contemporary queer point of view, the pitfalls of Benjamin's well-meant heteronormative definition quickly became appallingly obvious. Since society required trans people to represent themselves as either male or female, Benjamin's belief became a regulatory device that ensured patients' 'ap-

propriate' behaviour in their 'new' gender roles. The act of passing as the 'chosen' gender, was seen as essential to being trans. I was also confronted with this demand while transitioning. The people around me just wanted me to conform to my society's norms. But I could not do this, since that norm provided no place for me to fit in. The pressure was on me to become a model citizen: a straight male with no female past and no queer interests. Patients were issued new bodies on condition that they conform to binarity and reinvent their past to fit their new gender. Transitioning in Austria was and is possible at an early age due to public health insurance. But for most it came at a price; patients were required to agree to either sterilization, or castration.[7]

Luckily for me, the generations before me did not hide in their designated passive positions for long. They busied themselves in making our world a better place for themselves and future generations. It was a long battle for all of us who did not want to conform. Queer-oriented feminists Judith Butler and Donna Haraway gave us interesting options, without necessarily thinking about trans identities when they wrote about 'performing gender' and 'cyborgs' (Butler 1993; Haraway 2006). Trans writers and activists such as Sandy Stone, Susan Stryker, and, of course, Leslie Feinberg, saved the day by turning the buzzing made by the objects who spoke out for themselves as subjects from a murmur into a roar (Feinberg 1996; Stone 2006; Stryker 2006). We directed our roar at the increasing abuse from non-trans people who were offended by our bodies and lives, and who basically declared us monstrous abominations of nature. More and more trans people became visible as trans instead of fading out of the picture. They became visible in the press, in the arts, and in academia.

In those years I was aged between eleven and sixteen and I was smack in the middle of realizing my difference. I was ignorant of the exciting controversy swirling around me, and had not encountered the personalities involved in the battles being fought. I was fifteen before I first came across the term 'transsexual' and realized I might not be alone. But I only came across the liberating literature and encouraging people working on the diversity of trans issues when I was in university, about to write my dissertation on the motives behind my art and my trans experience. How did I manage in the years between? In school I tried to communicate what I felt like, but it was hard to express what does not exist in our language, so I explained that I knew myself to be 'in the wrong body'.[8] At home I took myself into the quiet woods. I hid my human face behind a furry mask. Astonishingly, despite being innocent of the ongoing debate on trans identity outlined above, I had

chosen to take my monstrosity and make it my shield and sword – my strength.

The Beast and the Elf

I adopted two personae to represent the complexity of my developing trans self, the monster (or Beast) and the Elf. I have performed my identity as a monster and as a Beast [fig. 5] from the age of eleven, and continue to do so to the present day. My monster is a Beast of nature, and not a smudge in the bright garden of human paradise. I did not become a monster through the infliction of surgery, like Frankenstein's creation; I was a monster long before I took any irreversible steps to alter my body. I am monstrous by virtue of not succumbing to human society's restrictive patterns of self-definition. I am a monster by simply being 'Other'. I gave up the humanity that insisted on judging and explaining me, and, instead embraced the animality that just asked me to survive as myself. I had no female, or male, role models, but I felt a strong affinity for monsters and was passionate about Beauty's Beast, Catherine's Vincent, and Han Solo's Chewbacca.[9] I actually got to enjoy being the odd one out. I was no girl and would never be a boy, so I became the Beast instead. It was the logical conclusion in a binary world that is divided into human and animal, and in which humanity is divided into male and female. Incompatibility with the male/female dichotomy marks one as less than human in this world, as a creature, but more dangerous than any animal: a monster. The Beast is too human to be neglected, yet too animal to be accepted. The Beast became my physical representation of the possibility of empowerment through difference.

Figure 5. Anthony Clair Wagner, 'Beast', 2005.

Radical difference makes it near impossible to belong and can result in an (involuntary) existence outside the common denominator of the 'Real'. This in turn can empower one to transcend boundaries, which are suddenly perceived as insubstantial since they are not 'True' boundaries but only exist in the agreed upon 'Reality' in the minds of the majority. How such empowerment can be perceived as a threat, is best expressed by Sandy Stone:

> The disruption of the old patterns of desire that the multiple dissonances of the trans body imply produce not an irreducible alterity [being other] but a myriad of alterities, whose unanticipated

> juxtapositions hold what Donna Haraway has called the promises of monsters – physicalities of constantly shifting figure and ground that exceed the frame of any possible representation. (Stone 2006, 232; parentheses mine)

She makes the connection between the artificially constructed body of the transsexual and the engineered body of Haraway's cyborg, both of which incorporate a positive monstrosity by 'skipping the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense' (Haraway 2006, 105). For Haraway the cyborg breaches boundaries such as the one between human and animal, and it does not want to return to the Garden of Paradise, that Christian version of Nature. Nor does my Beast. A garden, after all, is not natural; it does not grow of its own volition but according to human will, and it is defined by boundaries. I did not mind much that people could not fit me into their garden; I was still left with all the Wild to roam in after all.

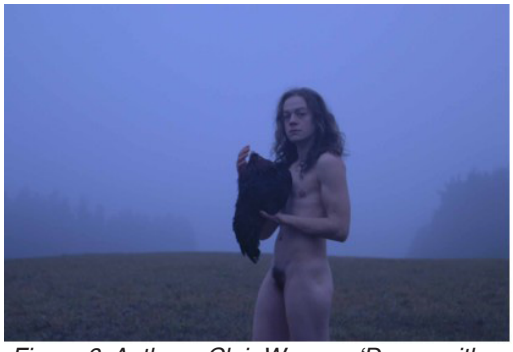

Figure 6. Anthony Clair Wagner, 'Dance with the dead cock', 2006.

In the development of my own semiotics, the Beast was followed by the more humanoid figure of the Elf [fig. 6], who has a human form but is, like the Beast and the cyborg, free of the Western concept of 'original innocence.' The Elf is a literally naked confrontation; it contains the presence of several oppositions in one body, such as female/male, human/nonhuman, positive/negative/neutral, and past/present/future. The dead cock in its hands represents several other aspects. It is a metaphor for Reality's taboos against confronting death and disease, and reflects the helplessness of heteronormative society when confronted with the possibility of being stripped of the mythical power of the male reproductive organ and thus of masculinity as its definition of the norm. A Reality that is based on the dominance of the straight white male is deeply threatened by the manifestation of a resemblance of masculinity that lacks the physical essentials of the ultimate definition of maleness. Furthermore, the Elf is placed in a seemingly natural environment to point out another incongruity between Truth and Reality, namely that the term 'natural' is frequently abused to justify rules and boundaries upholding this fictional version of Reality. Nature is a very flexible term and is based on several contrary images, such as that of the harmonious, untainted, garden-variety of nature incorporated in the image of the Christian paradise, versus the survival-of-the-

fittest battlefield of Darwin's evolution theory. Interestingly enough, most beliefs about the nature of Nature emphasize a degree of heteronormativity, which persists in the face of actual observations (Bagemihl 1999). Sandy Stone, in calling for an increased visibility as trans as opposed to the institutionally promoted 'norm' of passing, asks us to thereby disrupt and diversify the binarity of sex and gender (Stone 1991). The Elf points out the insubstantiality of Reality simply by being visible. Trans visibility has the power and impact of characters from fairy stories coming to life. It might be exciting to fantasize about the 'Other', but when the monsters dare to disrupt the comfort and security of everyday society, thoughts of torches and pitchforks are not far from people's minds.

The Elf resembles humans but combines the monstrosity of the Beast with the 'ubiquity and invisibility of cyborgs' (Haraway 2006, 106). The Elf can be seen as a beautiful monster: it looks so much like the accepted human form that it is nearly invisible as a monster, but is thereby all the more subversive and dangerous to the self declared norm. Trans people like me 'often successfully cite the culture's visual norms of gendered embodiment' (Stryker 2006, 247). But, by becoming the Elf, I can show my true form and avoid being misread by those operating within the framework of binary perception. The alter ego of the Elf also allows me to reflect on human fears about vulnerability and nature, and on the rejection and negation of death (these unseemly nuisances to the 'Lords of Creation'). Both Elf and Beast are exempt from a culture that accepts only the conventionally human as the ultimate life form, abhors otherness as embodied by the monster, wishes to rid itself of the *animal* weaknesses of mortality and disease, and considers itself the pinnacle of existence, aiming to exercise its power over the entire world. The Elf further serves to illustrate the strange seesaw pattern of attraction and rejection that is so often expressed in the fascination and irritation that non-trans people experience when they are confronted with trans corporeality.

Figure 7. Anthony Clair Wagner, 'In the Nordic light I shed my skin', 2008.

Even though Western human society experiences monstrosity and the animal as negative and inferior, I perform my alter egos as positive, albeit frightening, characters. They are strange but powerful. They have

no intent to harm even as they, by their very existence, transgress the boundaries of others. They are not absolute, have no fixed identities, and are not even necessarily separate entities [fig. 7]. They are transgressing and transforming, constantly changing, just like the liberated trans body and life. In this paradigm the Elf and the Beast morph out of and into each other, transgressing the boundaries between bodies and identities. Time also stretches and becomes elastic in the doubled presence of the Beast, which demonstrates once more the inadequacy of adherence to the binaries of before and after, the human and the non-human body, and inside and outside. The Beast is, after all, more often than not, a representation of the inner strength that can be gained through embracing one's inner monstrosity, while the Elf, rather, prompts the viewer's desire for the beauty of its surface, before snapping closed the trap of its ambiguity.

Monsters originally used to be 'messengers and heralds of the extraordinary' (Stryker 2006, 247). May I be so bold as to propose that in this case it is not the messenger, the monster, that is to be feared, but rather the message it delivers? Dare I entice you to think of trans people not as dysfunctional people, but rather, as Sandy Stone suggests, as a 'set of embodied texts' with a 'potential for *productive* disruption' (Stone 2006, 231)? Indeed, I am no longer concerned about passing as male or female; rather, I am curious about why I seem to be so effortlessly accepted as human when 'passing' but at the same time am denied inclusion in the human community as soon as I demand to declare myself. It makes me examine the concept of the 'human' in our society: I suspect the binary semiotics of sex and the gender system are essential to our current construction of human identity. However, as the Beast I reject this concept of humanity and celebrate my 'exclusion from a naturalized order of existence that seeks to maintain itself as the only possible basis for being a subject' (Stryker 2006, 253). As Myra J. Hird points out:

> in so far as most plants are intersex, most fungi have multiple sexes, many species transsex, and bacteria completely defy notions of sexual difference, this means that the majority of living organisms on this planet would make little sense of the human classification of two sexes, and certainly less sense of a critique of transsex based upon a conceptual separation of nature and culture. (Hird 2008, 236)

Stryker further develops this point in saying that: 'to encounter the transsexual body, to apprehend a transgendered consciousness articulating itself, is to risk a revelation of the constructedness of the natural

order' (Stryker 2006, 254). I am glad that I can deliver this risk to my audience whenever I embody the Elf.

I am born into promising times. Many trans people have followed Sandy Stone's call and have read themselves aloud by writing themselves into the discourses by which we have been written (Stone 2006, 232). We have started to reclaim words like 'monster,' as Susan Stryker has urged us to, and, like her, many of us have delivered our 'monstrous' message warning of the coming change (Stryker 2006, 246-247). Like Donna Haraway´s cyborgs, we are seizing the tools to mark the world that marked us as other (Haraway 2006, 112). We are at the tip of an iceberg whose true mass we can only guess at, leaders in a revolution gathering force behind us. We should not be afraid of the iceberg melting or of the developments ahead. We should joyfully set out to explore the future, as women, men, trans, monsters, humans, animals, or whatever, while the White Whale blows on the horizon.

Endnotes

[1]A term that I consider inappropriate and misleading, since I consider sex and even gender to be only aspects of being trans. Sexuality is another issue still. I will therefore simply use the word 'trans' in this paper.

[2]'Real' refers to the constructed reality of any society, as opposed to 'True' referring to actual facts of reality.

[3]Thanks to the artist for providing the image and granting permission to reproduce.

[4]Thanks to the artist for providing the image and granting permission to reproduce.

[5]Thanks to the artist for providing the image and granting permission to reproduce.

[6]Thanks to the artist for providing the image and granting permission to reproduce.

[7]In 2009 a precedent court ruling finally permitted trans persons legally to change their name and gender without first submitting to any operations.
<http://www.transx.at/Dokumente/VfGH_Geburtenbuch_2009.pdf>

[8]I don't believe that there are any wrong bodies, but I am painfully aware of the dangers immanent to the idea of a right body. The concept of any 'right' body is a direct threat of violence, as in racism, misogyny, obesity/ anorexia, and many more. See also Stone 1991, 231.

[9]Beast in the film, *Beauty and the Beast*, Disney Studios, 1991. (I resented the fact that the monster had to become human in order to arrive at the happy ending. Beauty and the Beast is originally a French fairy story, first published in 1740); Vincent in the US television series, *Beauty and the Beast,* created by Ron Koslow, 1987; Chewbacca in Star Wars - Episodes IV-VI, (1977, 1980, 1983), created by George Lucas.

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Challenges posed by transgender - passing within ambiguities and interrelations[1]

Jules Tamàs Fütty

This article critically interrogates current academic knowledge productions on transgender exemplified by figurations of passing. Following a deconstructionist approach, I challenge normalizations and silenced differences within dominant conceptionalizations of passing related to transgender. By investigating interconnected positionings of transgender within power relations, I will argue in favour of intersectional approaches to transgender. Regarding interrelations of knowledge productions and power relations, I will end by suggesting politics of articulation as means for epistemological-political-transformations referring to transgender.

Keywords: transgender, passing, intersectionality, normalizations, politics of articulation

I hated reading when I was a child. And I have no clue why my parents put me into school when I had just turned six. They told me it was a trend then. It wasn't trendy for me at all. In second grade, the teacher told my mother that I had hardly any reading and writing skills and that she should reduce her work to part-time to help me. I had what some people call dyslexia, never diagnosed, but still a huge difficulty within the norms of the German language. I still forget words in my sentences. I still sometimes write words so differently that, in former years, neither my mother nor my spelling programme were able to recognize them. I had a really hard time reading so I learnt texts by heart. After doing fourth grade twice I made it from Hauptschule to Gymnasium[2] and I started to perform. Acting and expressing myself, my anger, my gender trouble, my riot, not only taught me self-esteem, but also English.

Now I really enjoy reading and writing, but I still struggle to find my own words. Words that would vocalise my silence. The silence I swallowed for years. Silencing not only being a dyslexic in academia, and being trans and queer - I couldn't really hide that, even if I tried hard on the surface - but also the silence of

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growing up in a violent abusive family structure where sexism, constant money-shortage and racism were entangled just too much. Entangled just too much to blame only one structure of oppression. The ambivalences of a working-class background and later achieved middle-class access to education, being a 'binational child', located and raised in Germany, one parent German, the other a Hungarian who never got rid of the 'guest-worker-status' despite having a diploma and German citizenship. The ambiguities of not being 'totally German' but at the same time enjoying so many privileges of whiteness.

Sometimes I still lack voice to express these ambivalences and to find comprehensive words. But every time I speak, every time I enter the stage, I break the silence, I deal with the pain and the strength and I feel support. When I read my texts the audience reads me reading. I read the audience, how they read me and question, if I pass or don't. And if I pass, then how? As a guy, a transguy, a queer, a German, middle-class, academic, activist, boxer, performer, a writer? Then, I ask how the audience reads my texts, how they make sense to themselves, if they make sense at all. Yeah well, sometimes I really wish there would be a reading which is either right or wrong, instead of all these brackets. But still these pieces of the puzzle are mine. They are my breaks, my gaps, my inbetweens, ambiguities, cracks, voids and I can build more and more bridges between them. I tell you all that, expose myself and make myself vulnerable to make one point: The silence and invisibility about one's history that many trans_people[3] legitimately seek as the safe haven after years of hypervisibility, doesn't feel like a safe haven to me at all. I had to silence too much to not know the weight, the invisible burden and pain of shame and the danger of silenced histories. I won't be silent anymore and there is not only one silence.

To me that feels like another closet. A closet filled with the secrets of unmarked norms disguised as deviances, wrapped in parcels with string. Packages with stamps on top of them saying airmail. But they are everything but air. They don't leave air to breath. Another stamp: Attention – handle with care - breakable. Breakable indeed. Breaking down whole constructs. Breaking down brackets, slices of glass cutting through history, releasing toxic clouds of dust, exposing past wounds enacted in current pain. My closet reached to the ceiling filled with rocks of fear, scares and pain. I learned to collect them, to isolate them, to wrap them in packages. But I have also learned that I am not the only one who has a closet and that this closet is not a personal failure. A lot of trans_people have a closet in order to survive. But that closet very often contains more than transphobic violence and the painful

struggle of transition.

Maybe the closet gets lighter if we share the knowledge of how it feels to mingle between two cognitive systems, to transgress, to search for places where there are few or none available, to express the effort of saving one's heart from being confronted with misreadings, assaults and violence over and over again. But when we open the closed doors, very likely more packages will crack open than just tranny-packs. Packages containing experiences of sexist, racist, homophobic, classist and ableist discriminations. When we want to address these silences and the norms we faced and swallowed, we may discover that these packages do connect, that they cannot be separated. We might also question whether simply adding the label 'trans' on top of all the packages is enough.

The focal point of this article is the (de)subjugated knowledges (Foucault 2003, 7-8), which were highlighted in the introduction to *The Transgender Studies Reader* (Stryker and Whittle 2006, 1-19). In challenging subjugated knowledges exemplified by figurations of passing, I will use a deconstructionist perspective with the intention of interrogating normalizations (Butler 2004, 40-55) and silencings (Alarcón 1990, 363ff; McCall 2005, 1781) in knowledge productions of transgender. Following Derrida, I understand deconstruction not as a method, but as ongoing processes of pushing further by remaining sceptical about rules, norms and canonizations (Derrida 1988, 3). In this respect, I will not suggest a model or guideline for an all-embracing approach to critical research on transgender. Rather, I advocate two entry-points to conceptualizing deconstruction as a process: firstly, knowledge productions are never neutral and objective, but embedded within power relations, and, secondly, producing knowledge is an *activity* that can be understood as a constant epistemological-political undoing and redoing (Butler 2004; Lykke 2010). For critical research which intends to challenge the paradoxical and power-evasive subject-object-split between a *depersonalized, objective, neutral researcher* and the *object of research*, the continuous self-reflection of scholars regarding their *desires and relations* to their research is indispensable and situated within power relations (Hale 2006; Haritaworn 2008; Lykke 2010). In this regard my paper can be understood as a work-in-progress and situated reflection on current academic knowledge productions of transgender exemplified by figurations of passing, which is guided by the overall intention to engage in transdisciplinary and transversal dialogue, to challenge and interrupt norms of academic theorizing and furthermore to enhance consciousness of the interconnectedness of epistemological-political transfor-

mations.

In this paper I will open by interrogating terminologies and conceptions regarding transgender. I then turn my attention, using the example of passing, to examining normalizations and silenced differences within knowledge productions and argue in favour of intersectional/interdependent approaches to transgender that reflect the interrelation of knowledge productions and multiple power relations. Finally, I will propose a politics of articulation as a political-epistemological means to challenge normalizations within knowledge production on transgender.

Terminologies and theorizing transgender

In this section, I introduce my terminology of choice for this article and problematize contemporary dominant understandings of the terms transgender and transsexual. I also propose an alternative approach to meaning-makings of transgender.

I favour the term *transgender* rather than the term transsexual, because the term *transsexual* is conventionally signified and regulated by Western medical-pathological diagnoses of 'Gender Identity Disorder' (GID)[4] as well as national laws on transsexuality[5], which enforce binary gender/sex norms of subjecthood (man or woman) by means of pathologizations (Butler 2004, 75ff).[6] By using the term 'transgender' as a relatively open concept for different people who don't conform/go beyond/transgress binary gender/sex norms, who take hormones or don't and who want/had or don't want surgeries, name change and/or change of personhood (Butler 2004, 6; Stryker and Whittle 2006, 254), I emphasize practices of self-identification and self-naming,[7] as well as the heterogeneity of trans_identified people. I use the terms trans_people, trans_ and trans_identified as synonyms of transgender to express that the boundaries between transgender and transsexuals are not fixed but dynamic. Thus, I hope to disrupt the perceived dichotomy between transgender persons who live visibly and voluntarily beyond/between/outside binary gendered/sexed norms of subjecthood with no aim to physical transition and transsexuals who seek *complete* bodily transition via hormone therapy and 'Gender Reassignment Surgeries' (GRS).

This apparent dichotomy between transgender and transsexuals does not take into account the fact that access to transition for trans_identified people in Western countries is still highly policed and based upon pathologizations which enforce and subjugate gender/sex differences under a binary norm, with the aim of creating 'success-stories', assigning MaleToFemale transsexuals (M2Fs) and FemaleToMale transsexuals (F2Ms) a place of invisibility.[8] In this regard, transition is still very often imagined as a linear process from A (man or woman) to B ('the other

sex') with the underlying objective being to make trans_people fit into and readjust to binary gender/sex norms of subjecthood,[9] which are directly related to compulsory heterosexuality (Butler 1990, 1993, 2004; Namaste 2000; Valentine 2007) and to neo-liberal political economic interests to reinstall the productive (labour) forces of trans_people. Furthermore, I stress the necessity to situate, for example, questions of access to transition(ing) as inherently intertwined with racist and class-regulated in-accessibility to heath care[10] and moreover nation-states legal frameworks defining subjecthood/personhood which is connected to the in-accessibility to rights of non-discrimination/non-violation.

In 'Romancing the Transgender Native: Rethinking the Use of the 'Third Gender' concept,' Evan Towle and Lynn Morgan critique Western ideas of 'Third gender' in so-called 'other cultures' (Towle and Morgan 2006, 666-684). Following their line, I argue that transgender is not a self-evident term and concept, and that definitions vary more than just theoretically (Valentine 2007, 31). My hypothesis is that terminologies, conceptualizations and significations of transgender are always situated within specific socio-historical, geopolitical and cultural power relations, and therefore should not be exported or transferred cross-culturally as universal terms and concepts. In this regard, I consider academic and non-academic meaning-makings of transgender as positioned within the paradox of affirmative practices of re-signification, that is to say they are in danger of re-producing norms that silence differences within power relations. Thus, understandings of transgender are shaped not only by juridico-medical frameworks, but also by socio-cultural contexts. How then can these understandings be opened up?

In order to interrogate the problems of conceptualizing transgender in relation to dominant significations and silenced differences, I want to make a short detour to significations of queer, which I conceive as a useful analogy. Gloria Anzaldúa problematizes the way in which the term and concept 'queer', which emerged in the 1960s and '70s from US-American sexual cultures which 'fell outside' the rhetoric of 'recognition', 'sameness' and 'normality' of white middle-class gays and lesbians, has been taken over by white middle-class academics who reproduce the colour-evasiveness and simultaneous re-inscription of queer 'racial Others':

> Queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all 'queers' of all races, ethnicities and classes are shoved under. At times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our difference (Anzaldúa

1991, 250).

Further to Anzaldúa's emphasis on the acknowledgement of difference, Chandra Mohanty argues that not only the recognition of difference matters, but also how differences are presented, which differences are allowed and which are disqualified (Mohanty 2003, 193, 239).

I therefore suggest rethinking meaning-makings of transgender as situated knowledge productions (Haraway 1991, 183-185) and constitutive activities within powerful practices of regulation, normalization and silencing, as well as moments of disruption, aberration, resistance and subversion (Haraway 2004, 89, 105). Particularly insightful here is, for example, Carrie Sandahl's critique of the underlying silenced norm of ability within queer theory and politics. She not only stresses the necessity of recognizing differences, but also argues in favour of articulations of radical queer politics such as a refusal to pass:

> As outsiders, queers and crips *refuse to minimize* their differences by passing as either straight or able-bodied. Instead, they *appropriate* and *rearticulate* labels that the mainstream once used to *silence* or *humiliate* them and that liberal fractions of their subcultures would like to suppress (Sandahl 2003, 36; emphasis mine. See also McRuer 2003, 79-105; Siebers 2008, 291-307).

To me this figuration of passing connected to silences and rearticulations is highly interesting to interrogate further.

Passing[11] and interdependent politics of articulation

Historically the concept of passing has been importantly signified by the processes of racial passing within white Christian power structures (López 1996, 155ff; López 2005, 1-10; Wollrad 2005, 19-56), mainly in the United States, but also within Europe – especially in the case of Nazi-Germany (Pulver 1999, 95-97). Based upon colonial and Nazi ideologies of 'blood, race and soil' 'to keep the white race white' (Hodes 1999, 407) and maintained through societal structures that privilege the seemingly unmarked and invisible norm of whiteness (Frankenberg 1997; McIntosh 1988), racial passing most often indicates that a person passes as white and enjoys the temporary and precarious privileges of whiteness (Ginsberg 1996, 1-16). In this section, I want to explore the concept of passing as a way of exploring normalizations and silenced differences in relation to transgender. I will do this by looking, firstly, at the connections between passing and othering, before introducing an intersectional approach with a view to voicing previously silenced differences.

Passing and othering

Brooke Kroeger points out that the

underlying theoretical conceptualizations of passing are quite conflicting and controversial: 'In the most general way, it is passing when people effectively *present* themselves as o*ther than who they understand themselves to be*.… Passing never feels *natural*. It is a second *skin that never adheres'* (Kroeger 2003, 7, my emphasis). This conceptualization of passing is based upon the myth of a natural coherent 'self' conceived of as a combination of, and consequently potentially split between, 'inside' ('natural' feelings) and 'outside' (constructed upon physiological indicators, significantly skin as an embodied surface that can never bind and hold (the promise of) the presentation). In this understanding, passing is an effective self-presentation as *other* ('outside'), which doesn't correspond to the self-understanding ('inside'), and is hence a trick, an imposter.

Within (affirmative) transgender knowledge productions this understanding and usage of passing is not only challenged, but the illusion of a natural gendered/sexed self and body is also debunked. Passing most of the time is used to signify the *individual* experience and *moment* of being regarded as how trans_people *understand themselves*, or how they prefer to be regarded in respect to their self-identified gender/sex (Green 2000, 499-508; Koch-Rein 2006, 19-28). In contrast, 'being read' is very often considered as the opposite experience, namely the failure to pass (Butler 2004, 6). Furthermore, Sara Ahmed points out that passing is often conceived of in voluntaristic terms as a 'radical and transgressive practice' (Ahmed 1999, 88, 94), which indicates the impossibility of fixing identities, as well as foregrounding the limits of visibility and representations. At the same time, the underlying norm within dominant sociological accounts continues to conceptualize passing as the ability of a person to be considered as a member of 'another' - presumably stable and 'natural' - social group or identity category than the one to which a person is 'originally' considered to belong (Renfrow 2001)

The idea of 'origin' related to an 'original belonging' is of crucial importance, as this myth is constructed and rationalized within many positivist scientific approaches, and enables the installation and perpetuation of dominance. It is also a founding argument of nations and nationalism.[12] The ideology of an 'original belonging' needs to be contextualized within multiple power relations that operate by creating hierarchies through identity construction of 'self' and the 'others', as Trinh T. Minh-ha writes:

> If identity refers to the whole pattern of sameness within a being, the style of a continuing me that permeated all the changes undergone, then difference remains within the boundary of that

> which distinguishes one identity from another. This means that at heart X must be X, Y must be Y, and X cannot be Y. Those running around yelling X is not X and X can be Y, usually land in a hospital, a rehabilitation center, a concentration camp, or a reservation (Minh-ha 1997, 415).

The interrelation of power relations and dichotomous identity constructions, such as man/woman, occident/orient, white/black, culture/nature, mind/body, heterosexual/homosexual, non-trans/trans, can be better understood within the framework of othering. *Othering practices* indicate practices for *making-people-other* by essentializing and naturalizing differences as a means of constructing and legitimizing hierarchies, which are indispensably connected to colonizing and civilizing legacies and its perpetuations (Coronil 2002, 176-219; Dietze 2006, 233). *Othering practices* foreground the *activities* of constructing a superior *norm* of a coherent 'self' by projecting the 'others' as *deviant* and inferior (Haraway 2004, 113), wherein the productions of modern Western sciences are of crucial importance of rationalizing and legitimizing power relations (Campbell and Oakes 1997; McClintock 1997).

The connection between othering and passing is exemplified by Ahmed's interrogation of racial passing and the related difference between passing as and appropriating the subordinated other - passing as black as a white person - and passing as privileged norm - passing as white as a black person (Ahmed 1999, 93, 100). This difference, as Ahmed stresses, is not one based upon the reality and existence of different races, but a structural difference, built upon criteria for racial identification and categorizations, which are enunciated by 'apparatuses of knowledge' that are informed and inform colonial privilege (Ahmed 1999, 93, 97). Within this context, Ahmed notes a paradoxical aspect of passing: passing destabilizes norms by indicating the impossibility to *tell* and see the difference, but at the same time it fixes and secures power relations as differences are continuously reaffirmed (Ahmed 1999, 100, 89, 91). In this way, the 'not-I' is reproduced, as passing as a subordinated other requires *assuming, appropriating and mastering* the 'place of the other', but not 'being the other' (Ahmed 1999, 99). These practices are perpetuated within neo-liberal neo-colonial practices of cultural appropriation and commodification of 'the inappropriated others' (Minh-ha 1997), for example music, clothes, language etc.

In order to further interrogate underlying norms and mutual constitutive processes of subject formations vis-à-vis constructions of 'deviant others', I find Judith Butler's investigation of the question of *how* subjects become subjects insightful. Butler emphasizes processes of *be-*

coming subject as complex and paradox practices of *subjectivation* and *subjugation* under power structures (Butler 1997, 135), and stresses that the formation of a coherent 'inside' of a normalized subject *necessitates* a constitutive 'outside', the *abject* as the unintelligible, unthinkable, unlivable, untellable, incoherent (Butler 1993, 8, 52, 53, 94, 243). With regards to the gender/sex dimension of othering, I want to stress that the compulsive binary gender/sex norm of subjecthood (man or woman) is constitutively built upon the abjection of trans_people and intersexuals as 'un-natural', 'deviant', 'abnormal' and 'sick other' (Spade 2006, 319). Sandy Stone also connects passing to the abjections of trans_people and intersexuals as 'unintelligible other', and outlines a complex and problematic interconnection of denied subjecthood and passing, which can be understood as a kind of double-edged sword:

> It is difficult to generate a counter-discourse if one is programmed to disappear… The most critical thing a transsexual can do, the thing that *constitutes success*, is to 'pass'. Passing means to live successfully in the gender of choice, to be accepted as a 'natural' member of that gender. Passing means the denial of mixture. One and the same with passing is *effacement* of the prior gender role, or the construction of a *plausible history* (Stone 2006, 230; emphasis mine).

Referring to the normalized, gendered, sexed binary, the neologism *cisgender*[13] used for non-trans_people highlights the idea of a congruence between the gender/sex assigned in the birth certificate (male or female) and the lived and embodied gender/sex, which is sometimes combined with compulsory heterosexual behaviour (Serano 2007, 24-26, 161-195). The use of *cisgender* needs to be further reflected upon politically-epistemologically as way of shifting focus from the 'un-naturalness', 'abnormality' and 'deviance' of trans_people and intersexuals towards the underlying silenced norms of compulsory binary gender/sex subjecthood, and myth of a 'natural' and 'essential' gender/sex dichotomy. This shift from 'otherness' towards interrogations of norms and normalizations reflects scientific-political transformations emerging from within Postcolonial Studies, Critical Whiteness Studies, Critical Occidentalism, Critical Heteronormativity Studies, Critical Masculinity Studies, Critical Dis/Ability Studies etc.

As the emergence of the term cisgender demonstrates, processes of meaning-makings of transgender cannot be separated from power relations which enforce not only binary gendered/sexed and heterosexualized norms of subjecthood, but which are also inextricably interwoven with practices of racializa-

tion, class stratification, heterosexualization, as well as constructions of dis/ability and age. In this respect, the terminology of passing is also used to signify perceived positions concerning race, class, dis/ability, sexual orientation, education, religion, age and gender/sex identity. Despite, or rather because of, these complexities, I consider passing a productive figure to interrogate mutual constitutive subjugations of differences within intertwined power relations.

Intersectional perspectives

Influenced by the Combahee River Collective's 'Black Feminist Statement' about 'interlocking systems of oppression' (Combahee River Collective 1981, 210-218) and the analytic approaches of *intersectionality* (e.g. Crenshaw 1991) and *interdependence* (e.g. Walgenbach et al. 2007) that it inspired, I propose an intersectional reflection on transgender-passing, which conceptualizes power relations of binary asymmetric gender/sex norms as *interdependent* with, and thus mutually constitutive of, norms and positionings related to, race/class/sexuality/dis-ability. These positionings can be understood as discursively constructed and transitive, but at the same time existing as real, institutionalized and conventionalized practices of discrimination/privilege within interrelated power relations (Lykke 2006, 150-160).

In addressing discrimination in debates about intersectionality Erel et al argue that current approaches often fail to address disability and transphobia, and also put 'white trans people and non-trans people of colour in mutual competition' (Erel et al. 2008, 9). I consider this competitive situation, which addresses either questions of racism or transphobia or ableism or classism, to be a fundamental problem which reveals how critical research participates in power dynamics and its acts of re-producing norms and silenced difference (Hornscheidt 2007, 88-100). With a nod to Audre Lorde's 'There is No Hierarchy of Oppression' (Lorde 1983), I aim to resist the idea of evaluating and ranking different dimensions of passing hierarchically, as passing is always situational and context-specific and does not always relate to the achievement of a hierarchically privileged position. Hence, practices of passing remain ambivalent regarding the potential complicity in re-producing powerful norms and should not be interrogated abstractly, but contextualised and positioned within interrelated power dynamics. For example, Female2Male transsexuals as well as Male2Female transsexuals achieve a privileged position if they pass as cisgender, but, at the same time, F2Ms and M2Fs are positioned differently within Western patriarchal society structures that privilege masculinity over femininity.

I want to foreground that passing

does not only depend on the recognition of other people, but that it also encompasses several power relations and related codes which vary in regard to socio-political, historical, cultural and economical contexts. In this respect, it is important to locate and differentiate explicitly the conceptions of passing both theoretically (Koch-Rein 2006, 19-28) and within daily norms of interconnected power relations, which should not be equated or conflated, but which ought to be reflected within their complexity and mutual constitution. Moreover, I propose rethinking passing less as an *individual* experience (micro level), which depends only on the recognition of others - mostly those who are in power to decide what is 'normal' - but as *precarious agency*, ability, technique, a learning of codes, which relates to social mobility within power relations (micro and macro level). At the same time, it has to be kept in mind that not everyone can pass because passing is constitutively limited by predominant (naturalized-pathologized) norms of subjecthood.[14] As Vivianne K. Namaste provocatively writes: 'What does the normalization of transsexualism mean for transgenders of color, for those who are poor, for artists, or for sex trade workers?' (Namaste 1996, 195).

Thus, I claim that passing can be considered as a *precarious, temporally regulated passage*, which can be stopped at any moment. Passing can never be a safe position because there is the *constant and constitutive* threat of being hindered from passing and read as 'other', and in terms of mutual constitutive power relations there is not just one "other". Most of the time, passing is not a 'choice' or a strategic positioning, but a precarious movement and often a question of survival. To imagine passing as an instance of 'choosing' acceptance in a so-called 'other' social group or identity category than the one to which the person is considered to 'originally belong', is a trivialization and normalization of the discrimination and violence that trans_people, People of Color, people with disabilities and homosexuals face.

To return to the beginning of this article, where I problematized silence connected to knowledge production on transgender and stressed the activity of meaning-making and agency, I want to emphasize that passing is not only linked to the politics of visuality and visibility,[15] but also to voice and voicing. As Evelyn Hammonds argues: 'visibility in and of itself does not erase a history of silence nor does it challenge the structure of power and domination, symbolic and material, that determines what can and cannot be seen. The goal should be to develop a 'politics of articulation'' (Hammonds 1991, 152). With this in mind, I suggest re-thinking passing as a productive figure that shifts the focus away from homogenized identity categories and the *representation* and *in-*

tegration of new identity categories which set up new boundaries and exclusions, and instead towards investigations into simultaneously existent normalizations and silencings regarding transgender. Keeping in mind Haraway's statement that 'boundaries take provisional, never-finished shape in articulatory practices' (Haraway 2004, 89), I stress the necessity for a double-move in knowledge productions on transgender: The undoing of normalized knowledge production, which regulate and re-produce binary gender/sex norms of subjecthood, and the re-doing of knowledge productions which interrelates subjugations and normalizations.

Linda Schlossberg argues that passing can be understood as a kind of agency to destabilize norms through creating and establishing an 'alternative set of narratives' (Schlossberg 2001, 4). Inspired by this, I want to rethink voice and the politics of articulating not only as a threat of 'being read', but also as *providing agency to voice and articulate difference*. In particular, my desire is to engage in rearticulations and re-significations of transgender which grasp ambivalences, complexities, differences and seemingly uncategorizable resistances that challenge not only binary gender/sex norms in knowledge productions, but which also enable political transformations by *interrelating* resistance towards different dimensions of oppression and subjugation[16], and thus radically challenging and politicizing norms of what is considered to be human (Butler 2004, 23, 39, 88-90). In this regard, I conceive of a politics of articulation as a possibility to disrupt and subvert norms of authorized and conventionalized knowledge productions that relate the personal to the political, enunciating *interrelated* subject positions, knowledges and histories, which are simultaneously situated, repressed, resistant and transforming within intertwined power relations.

Inspired by Nina Lykke's argument that 'excess meaning and ambiguity tend to sneak into the binary scheme' of knowledge production (Lykke 2010, 280), I want to end - and at the same time begin - by suggesting engaging with excess-meanings of transgender by a *politics of articulation* which interrupts norms and homogenized identity categories within knowledge production by investigating ambivalences, shades, cracks, gaps and inbetweens as productive and potential political-epistemological loci for further theorizing transgender. In Haraway's terms: 'To articulate is to signify. It is to put things together, scary things, risky things, contingent things. I want to live in an articulate world' (Haraway 2004, 106).

Open End

In this article, I pointed out firstly that the term and concept transgender should not be transferred cross-culturally as a universal concept.

Rather, normalizing and silencing practices within Western research on transgender need to be reflected upon critically with regards to their practices of negotiating and authorizing meanings, which are both in danger of re-producing norms and silencings, but which can also enable subversions and interruptions. With a nod to Haraway, I stated that knowledge production on transgender can be better understood as situated meaning-makings. Secondly, using the example of passing, I argued that transgender cannot be comprehensively theorized under the single category of sex/gender, because trans_identified people are *simultaneously* constituted by gendered/sexed, racialized, sexualized, dis/abled, aged and class-based subjugations and their related discriminations/privileges. By conceptualizing knowledge production as *agency within intertwined power relations*, I proposed engaging in a *politics of articulation* as a means of interrupting academic norms and opening up space for knowledge productions which position, resignify and re-politicize meaning-makings of transgender within intertwined power relations.

Endnotes

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[2] The German school systems divides young pupils after four years of elementary school into a three-class-divided school system according to educational performance measured in grades: Hauptschule (lowest level); Realschule (middle level) and Gymnasium (highest level and usually the only route to enter university afterwards).

[3] With the underscore in trans_identification, trans_identified, trans_people and trans_ I aim to highlight differences in regard to positionings among trans_people.

[4] The diagnosis 'Gender Identity Disorder' (GID) is a medically produced classification of mental and behavioural disorders, which is internationally consolidated and legitimized by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD) 10th Revision - Version for 2007 Chapter V F64 'Gender identity disorder' (302.5- 302.6, 302.85), http://apps.who.int/classifications/apps/icd/icd10online/index.htm?gf60.htm+ as well as in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental Disorders (DSM IV-TR), published by the American Psychiatric Association under the Chapter 'Sexual and Gender Identity Disorder'.

[5] See for example the German 'Transsexuellengesetz'.

[6] Pathological classifications of trans_people by the diagnosis 'Gender identity Disorder' are strongly contested by transgender networks and human rights bodies within the European context, e.g. by TransGender Europe (TGEU) and their 'Stop Trans Pathologization 2012'- campaign (http://www.tgeu.org/node/78).

[7] The significance of naming is pointed out

for example in Butler's theorizing. With reference to Althusser's concept interpellation, Butler argues that becoming subject (subjectivation) particularly works via being called and named into being. Interpellations are pointed out as gendered/sexed speech acts, such as the highly significant normalized question 'Is it a boy or a girl?': 'The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm' (Butler 1993, 8, 44; Butler 1997, 135; see also Hornscheidt 2007, 70-72; Hornscheidt 2008, 22-23; Lykke 2010, 281).

[8] I do not argue that the wish to be invisible as trans_ is not legitimate. Rather, I suggest that invisibility and disclosure of an 'incoherent' past (having a birth certificate of the 'other sex') need to be considered and problematized as ambivalent protective and survival strategies of trans_people being confronted by daily verbal and physical violence, as well as denial of legal-political personhood as trans_ (Scheman 1997). I thank Lann Hornscheidt and Doro Wiese for inspiring thoughts on the ambivalence of silence and disclosure.

[9] I am aware that there are trans_people, who are comfortable in identifying within binary sex/gender norms of subject, as either 100% man or woman, for whom my argument about the societal and economic pressure to readjust to binary norms might not account.

[10] In this regard the in-accessibility to transitioning for many trans_people, which is related to the unwillingness of public health care institutions to cover the costs, needs to be reflected upon critically within a larger framework of the neoliberal endeavours of Western governments to externalize their responsibility for providing health care to the private (see Cox 1995; Maarse 2006; Davis 2001).

[11] I thank Urmila Goel for feedback and inspiring exchange on this part.

[12] For critical interrogations of nationalism and its construction upon the myth of 'origin' see for example Anderson: 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist' (Gellner quoted in Anderson 1991, 6; Balibar 1992; Hobsbawn 1988). Yuval-Davis and McClintock also investigate the racialized and gendered/sexed as well as heterosexualized family-metaphor as naturalized genesis narrative of nations and nationalism: 'The family as a metaphor offered a single genesis narrative for national history while, at the same time, the family as an institution became void of history and excluded from national' (McClintock 1997, 91. See also Yuval-Davis 2001, 27). See also Puar's interrogation of national-racist continuities, which also comprise western gay-lesbian politics, highlighted by the concept homonationalism (Puar 2007).

[13] Linguistically the prefix cis signifies 'on the same side as', whereas the prefix trans indicates 'across, beyond or opposite'. The preference for using the prefix cis instead of the prefix bio (in German 'bio-woman' and 'bio-man') relates to the underlying connotation of bio with pathologized 'natural' gender/sex, which can be traced biopolitically by hormone tests in blood and chromosome tests. See also racist continuities of blood-based and chromosomal racial categorizations, as well as the permanence of eugenic discourses and practices concerning so-called sicknesses and/or dis/abilities (Elbe 2005, 406-413).

[14] Julie Greenberg for example analyzes how, in U.S. legal history, legal personhood has historically been built upon binary biological constructs of race and gender/sex: 'Originally, legal classification systems based upon race and sex operated on the assumptions that (1) race and sex are binary, and (2) race and sex can be biologically determined' (Greenberg 2002, 103).

[15] For a reflection of visibility in regard to the virtual see Haraway (2004, 106-107).

[16] e. g. by assemblages or rhizomes see Deleuze/Guattari (1987); Puar (2007).

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Subtle pressures, coercive sterilizations and denials of access: A trans-crip approach to reproductive subjectivation

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This paper discusses the topics of reproductive subjectivation and new reproductive technologies from a trans-crip perspective. Part one discusses this using the example of the dominant reproductive settings in Germany with which people termed transsexual and disabled are currently confronted; here, analogies, differences and contradictions will be outlined. In the second part I contemplate an intersectional perspective – presenting a critical discussion of notions of the reproductive subject in transgender/queer approaches as well as in contributions coming from disability studies.

Keywords: Trans-Crip, Reproduction, Reproductive Subjectivities and Technologies, Neo-Eugenics

Introduction

Reproductive subjectivation and new reproductive technologies (NRTs)[1] form key themes in transgender/queer[2] and disability studies. However, little exchange has taken place between the two approaches yet and each of them contains significant gaps. Transgender/queer discussions about new reproductive technologies, for example, often ignore the neo-eugenic effects of these technologies and frequently reduce the problem to a question of accessibility. Debates on neo-eugenics and reproductive subjectivity in disability studies in turn do not reflect on their own heteronormative gender assumptions. Therefore, the central claim of this paper is that the complexity of reproductive subjectivation in the context of new reproductive technologies can only be grasped adequately if an intersectional approach is applied.

Firstly, this paper maps hegemonic reproductive settings of people who are classified as transsexual and disabled. I aim to tease out the analogies and contradictions of their reproductive situations. Problems like coercive sterilization, divestitures of a reproductive identity, or the exclusions from dominant categories of a valued reproductive subject will be discussed. Secondly,

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the paper suggests that an intersectional theoretical trans-crip approach to reproductive subjectivation may provide critical correctives to the absences in transgender and crip theory. Notions of the reproductive subject in disability studies will be transgendered and approaches of reproduction in queer/transgender studies will be crippled.[3]

I will focus on heteronormative and disabling reproductive settings in Germany and restrict the scope of analysis to the German context. This paper does not represent a 'fully developed' empirical intersectional approach. It is not based on a comprehensive qualitative study, but should rather be read as some preliminary questions and ideas. This article draws on qualitative approaches which have been conducted in the fields of disability and transgender studies (e.g. Brauckmann 2002; Hermes 2004). The paper draws on six email responses from persons who identify as transmen. Four of these men are part of my 'private' networks, the other two are transgender activists and/or theorists. I approached them by asking if they feel restricted regarding their 'reproductive potential' by the German law on transsexuality or/and if there are other factors, subtle pressure which have a stronger effect than legislation.[4] The question was intended to be a first exploration of the topic, therefore I did not use any specific methodology. Later I asked them if I could use their answers for this publication and I assured anonymity. All agreed.

I draw on the German context because I grew up in Germany and speak the German language, so the choice of the German situation is a result of my own positioning and of questions of accessibility of texts, websites, resources, or possible interviewees. My assumption is that what may be special about the German case is a certain public awareness towards disability issues perhaps because of Germany's eugenicist history during national socialism, but that this awareness does not necessarily extend to trans issues. These, however, are only assumptions.

This contribution is further limited by a focus on transmen and the omission of transwomen. This is the result of my first impression (and maybe othering and biologizing projections) that transmen - more than transwomen - are deprived of their reproductive potentialities in Germany. As I will show in the following text, transmen have to undergo surgery, whereas transwomen are not allowed to use their frozen sperm for fathering a child. This of course mirrors my own initial assumption of reproduction as something bodily, as a biological bodily state. I am aware of the devaluing aspect of social reproduction and parenthood that this contains. Of course not only the situation of transwomen should be examined but also of people who do not identify as one of the two gen-

ders, who understand themselves as intersex, queers and many more.

Heteronormative and disabling reproductive settings

I will now sketch some of the main aspects that frame the reproductive situation of people classified transgender/queer or disabled in Germany. The mechanisms which deprive these persons of their reproductive potentials are without doubt heterogeneous and diverse. However, there are also analogies. I will now sketch both situations and argue that their common denominator is the denial of a 'full' reproductive status, which is often described as a status of a 'non parent'. In other words, the status of a valued reproductive subject is not, or at least not 'naturally,' bestowed on transgender persons and persons with disabilities.

In Germany, the reproductive status of transgendered persons is influenced by the Law on Transsexuality (*Transsexuellengesetz* - TSG). The law was enacted in 1980 and regulates the change of first names and legal gender. Paragraphs 1-3 of Section 8 state:

> Upon petition of a person who, due to their transsexual persuasion, no longer perceives their birth registry sex but rather the other sex to be appropriate to them and who has been compelled for at least three years to live according to this perception, it is for the court to determine that this person be considered as belonging to the other sex when they: 1. fulfill the conditions of section 1 para. 1 subpara. 1-3; 2. are not married; 3. are permanently incapable of reproduction. (Gesetz über die Änderung der Vornamen und die Feststellung der Geschlechtszugehörigkeit in besonderen Fällen 1980; Translation Samantha Taber)

The law also says that in order for a change of birth name or the civil status of a person to be approved, two official expert opinions have to be presented to a court and the person must be permanently infertile. In fact that means that if a person wants to change their recorded sex they must not only be unmarried but also subject themselves to surgical intervention. The reproductive status of transmen is thus fundamentally influenced by the Law on Transsexuality (TSG) (Lode 2008).

Among transmen there is no unified stance regarding the prescription of permanent reproductive inability; further, the positioning here is strongly contested. In his empirical study on the 'Actuality of Transsexual Men,' Jannik Brauckmann demonstrates that for many transmen, the Law on Transexuality (TSG) does not represent any sort of problem, as it actually accommodates their desire to 'de-feminize' (Brauckmann 2002, 77-81).[5] One transgender activist confirmed this

appraisal in an email response to my question about which factors currently have the most significant influence on the reproductive status of transmen:

> Unfortunately I don't understand your question quite clearly – if I've misunderstood something, please explain briefly. Assuming that his change in civil status has been made, a transman has just as much of an opportunity as a 'normal sterile man' to become a father – by way of adoption or of artificial insemination (along with a female partner who agrees). Or are you referring to the fact that the TSG requires removal of the gonads as a prerequisite for the change in civil status? This is in fact a matter on which we are not of one mind. By means of long-term hormone treatment the ovaries are generally 'deactivated' anyway, and for most, though naturally not all, transmen, the thought of carrying a child to term themselves is both a horror and an impossibility. Should it come to this, then the problems of acceptance will surely not come from the side of the law-makers alone; within the so-called 'trans-community' itself there is a broad range of opinions and attitudes regarding the issue of 'man and baby having.' The ideal case, that it would be possible for us as men to father a child, is currently – and in the future too I fear – unfortunately not realizable (Translation Samantha Taber).[6]

This quote however reveals an alternative position regarding the prescription of permanent reproductive inability. The reference in the above quotation to 'not being of one mind' hints at the position taken by other transgender activists and theorists who have claimed that this requirement interferes with the right to physical integrity. The law's impact on transmen is, according to these positions, a violation of bodily integrity and compulsory sterilization, especially because a simple sterilization is usually not seen as sufficient, 'but castration is required instead' (Lode 2008).[7] The transgender association TransMann e.V. comments:

> This mandate of inability to reproduce is a matter of compulsory sterilization for an entire group of people. It is irrelevant in this matter that large numbers of transgender people wish to undergo operations that have this result or that the removal of the gonads for long-term hormone treatment is sensible. It cannot be made into a legal prescription (TransMann 1999; Translation Samantha Taber).

In effect, the law requires that in order for one's sex to be reassigned, one must become reproductively neutered. What the law thus

expresses is that sexual modes of existence, where the bodies do not satisfy the usual morphological demands of sex clarity, are not desired or accepted as reproductive subjects.[8] Experiences of the denial of a reproductive status form not only everyday experiences for transgender/queer people but also for people classified as disabled. Therefore I will now turn to the reproductive situation of supposedly disabled people and sketch some of the key aspects.

The withholding of motherhood from women with disability has a long tradition in Germany. During the Weimar Republic (1919-1933), for example, the policies of marriage guidance councils aimed at the prevention of 'hereditary diseased offspring'. These councils issued health certificates, which aimed at proscribing the so-called reproductive fitness of women (Manz 2007, 51).[9] Though compulsory sterilization was discussed at this time, it was not yet legally prescribed (Benzenhöfer 2006, 93; Manz 2007, 73). It only became a legal prescription for certain sectors of the German population, however, when the National Socialist Party rose to power and introduced The Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Diseased Offspring.[10] While the law prohibited the use of sterilization procedures on so-called 'healthy Aryan women' who might seek the use of such procedures as a form of contraception, it prescribed the sterilization of people with disability even without their consent (Benzenhöfer 2006, 92; Onken 2008, 51).

After 1945 the Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Diseased Offspring was repealed (Sierck and Radtke 1984, 103–104). Coercive sterilization was, however, still practiced and especially for people who were considered as being unable to consent, which means people classified as mentally disabled were affected (Hermes 2004, 31). Swantje Köbsell (1996, 19; translation mine) says: 'Until this point (the amendment of the *Betreuungsgesetz*[11] on 1.1.1992) it was common to sterilize mentally disabled girls before they turned 18 – though it was already illegal at that time.'

The reasons that were put forward for forced sterilization were often quite similar to those provided during national socialism. Only after Panorama, a critical German investigative tv programme, dealt with the topic was a broader public debate initiated in Germany. As a consequence, the German federal government acted and finally launched a law which bans coercive sterilization. The law is called Betreuungsgesetz (BtG) and defines the legal situation of people with disability in Germany. At present, BtG prohibits sterilization not based on personal consent (Wagner-Stolp 2004; Pixa-Kettner 2008). This means that compulsory sterilization of women with disabilities (or the requirement that they give up their children for adoption) is no longer performed and

denotes an exception. However, there are still subtle pressures when it comes to mothering and women with disability (Hermes 2004, 32-35; Prilleltensky 2004, 68; Onken 2008, 70). Gisela Hermes underlines four commonly made assumptions about mothers with disability that may discourage women with disability from engaging in mothering: (1) mothers with disability are unable to take over responsibility for their child, (2) children suffer from the disability of their parents, (3) mothers with disability cause supplementary public expenses, (4) a disabled mother will have a disabled child (Hermes 2004, 33-34).

How then are the intersections of the reproductive situations of trans and disabled people best described? It seems that the common denominator between the living conditions of transgender people and people with disabilities is that a self-evident reproductive status is not granted, but rather denied. However, there are also crucial differences between the ways in which this status is withheld from members of these 'groups'. The reproductive potential of transmen was only recently limited by German law and is still dominated by the topic of compulsory sterilization. In contrast, people with disability have been explicitly protected from forced sterilization by The Betreuungsgesetz (BtG) since 1992. Thus, it would seem that the withholding of reproductive possibilities from these groups is produced by a whole range of social and legal mechanisms which act to neutralize their gender, erotic and sexual identities.

Neutralisation includes, but is not limited to, building design which foresees only one bathroom for people with disabilities, thus ignoring the fact that people with disabilities probably also identify as man or woman. Gender neutralization also happens in that a common experience of women in a wheelchair is that they are not perceived as sexy beings. So it is not a random but a constant experience of being overlooked and not being flirted with. It is not the experience of being let down or of being single for a while, but of regularly falling out of the whole play of flirting, dating, having sex, being represented in porn, being asked when or if one wants to have children or why one does not have kids. In terms of reproduction in particular, this means that a common experience faced by many people with disabilities is shocked, defensive or insecure reactions when they express their wish of becoming a mother, father or a parent. This could be from the mother who doubts that the daughter with a disability is capable of caring for her child, or from the gynaecologist who after having conducted a pregnancy test does not congratulate or even ask if the pregnant women with a disability wants to keep her child.

An intersectional trans-crip perspective

What would an alternative intersectional trans-crip perspective on reproductive subjectivity which gives special consideration to the matter of new reproductive technologies (NRT) look like? By means of a critical, intersectional look at the problematic dimensions of NRTs, the complexity of reproductive subjectivity – that is, the analogies, conflicts and irreconcilabilities of genderizing, heteronormative and disabling subjectivisation processes – can be particularly well illuminated. Finally, until now there have been no studies available that look at the intersectional relationship in the context of bio- and reproductive technologies. Thus, I will now outline trans/queer perspectives on NRTs, then crip/disability studies perspectives on NRTs, and then discuss what the two can learn from each other.

Trans/queer perspectives on NRTs

What do trans/queer theories of NRTs have to offer for an integrated approach? One of the strengths of such theories is the way in which they underline the trans/queer potential of NRTs.[12] Although Judith Butler herself does not deal with the matter of biotechnological body fragmentation, or with heteronormative body concepts in the realm of NRTs, her critique of the premises of feminist theories can be helpfully developed into a trans/queer approach towards NRTs. Butler shows that the assertion of an integral, intelligible female body is based on the problematic assumption of two sexes and that sex itself is always a gendered concept. The idea of a biological sex is the product of mechanisms of boundary drawing, which are regulated by power (Butler 1991). Based on this understanding of sex, any reference to a pure body, that is, one which is prior to biotechnologies, is a powerful illusion and inappropriate as the basis for a contemporary feminist position which aims to take the constitutive effects of such technologies into account.

A trans/queer approach to NRTs would thus take up Butler's critique of the coercive regime of sex/gender, identity/desire and specify how this regime operates in the context of reproductive technologies. For example, a trans/queer approach to NRTs might interpret potential usages of NRTs such as in-vitro fertilization as fulfilling trans/queer ideas of reproduction (Haraway 1995; Shildrick 1997; Graham 2002; Weber 2004; Stacey 2008). By disembodying the act of reproduction, these techniques expose the artifactual character of the connections between reproductive sex/reproductive gender identity/heterosexual intercourse/procreation. Thereby the heterosexual sex act would lose its definition as the sole creator of human life. The coalescence of a 'man' and a 'woman,' from which

the heteronormative ideas of biological parenthood and kinship derive, would be challenged, if not undermined (Wenner 2002; Mense 2004; Bock von Wülfigen 2007).

In this way, NRTs open up many new possibilities for subverting heteronormative gender regimes. This aspect of NRTs is underlined by Cathy Griggers when she writes: 'the technology of cross-uterine egg transplants finally allows a lesbian to give birth to another lesbian's child, a fact that to date has gone entirely unmentioned by either the medical community or the media' (Griggers 1994, 122-123). Elaine Graham also asserts the 'new possibilities for postbiological parenting' (Graham 2002, 112; see also Shildrick 1997, 180-181; Stacey 2008, 224-225).

Trans/queer approaches tend to judge reproductive technologies positively: they underline their potential to de-genderize or de-sexualize normative gender settings. On a more practical political level this embracing of new reproductive technologies often results in the mere postulation of free access to NRTs and a critique of their heteronormative regulations. Although Butler, for example, commented – albeit not explicitly – in a 2001 interview on the eugenic impact of new reproductive technologies, she focused mainly on questions of access:

> I am against what we call social engineering of all kinds. We shouldn't be selecting what kinds of human beings should be made. And I think we shouldn't fight for biotechnology in order to overcome heterosexuality. The heterosexuals make use of reproductive technology all the time. When a heterosexual couple wants to have children they get usually access to reproductive technology in one way or another. The only question I have is whether gay couples or single women are not given the same access to that kind of technology. For me it is a question of politics of access... I am interested in equal access to reproductive technologies. And I am interested in new forms of kinship (Butler 2001).

A critical approach towards new reproductive technologies is thus often erased or absent in trans/queer approaches. Instead, questions surrounding new technologies are reduced to issues of mere access to the technology. Sexual and reproductive self-determination in the course of new reproductive technologies are interpreted as 'free and equal access' (e.g. Ommert 2007, 24).[13]

By arguing in such a way, these trans/queer arguments and positions implicitly support the increased use and societal establishment of new reproductive technologies. The potential of NRTs to destabilize biological parenthood has led to their social acceptance and at the same

time to the devaluation of social parenthood. Such a standpoint also ignores the fact that long before the emergence of new reproductive technologies 'biological fathering' and social fatherhood could be and were separated. An example of this separation is the 'woman-marriage' or 'gynogamy' practiced by some forty patrilineal societies in South, West, and East Africa. The 'gynogamy' is a marriage between two or more women. This acknowledged, contractual partnership has the aim to start a family and to generate legal descendants. It is thus a form of kinship in which biological, genetic and social parenthood and kinship are fragmented (Tietmeyer 1985, 2, 131; Tietmeyer 1997, 53).[14] The fragmentation of parenthood is thus also possible without new reproductive technologies. Trans/queer approaches therefore tend to suggest that only with the emergence of NRTs has it become possible for people in trans/queer relationships to become parents.

Crip/disability studies perspectives on NRTs

There are currently a number of different scholars spread over Germany and German academic institutions who deal with disability studies themes, although, to date, disability studies is not a 'fully' established 'new' discipline in this sphere. Rather I would describe it as an emerging field, in which the approaches dealing with reproduction and NRTs can roughly be divided into two strands.

The first strand narrows the topic of reproductive issues and NRTs to a discussion of the moral status of 'the embryo'. It encompasses pro life positions that underline the value of the embryo's life (Zülicke 1996; Dabrock and Klinnert 2001; Spaemann 2001; Rixen 2005; Schockenhoff 2005). These approaches, which often consist of theological or juridical positions, do not include a transgender approach and often ignore questions of gender issues altogether. Sometimes they are even highly problematic for subjects embraced as reproductive subjects, namely for persons classified as White, married, intelligible, heterosexual women. Peter Dabrock and Lars Klinnert in their argument against embryo research suggest, for example, rethinking the German law on abortion under which it is illegal yet possible for women to abort. The law stipulates that an abortion within the first three months of pregnancy is not allowed but is an unpunishable offence provided that the woman seeks independent counselling first (Dabrock and Klinnert 2001, 8). Dabrock and Klinnert assert: 'Moreover there would have to be a necessity to correct the legislation on abortion' (ibid. 8). In fact this would mean making abortions in Germany much more difficult to access again. In this disability studies approach a critique of neo-eugenics is thus played out against a feminist perspective, or more precisely, the

perspective of a pregnant woman is silenced.

The second strand is comprised of feminist disability studies and German feminist approaches. Those working within feminist disability studies and also feminist bioethics are quite sophisticated in grasping neo-eugenics (e.g. Degener 1992; Braun 2002; Graumann 2002, 2005; Waldschmidt 2003; Feldhaus-Plumin 2006; Schultz 2008, 2009). They show that, with the emergence of new reproductive technologies, women are increasingly made responsible for carrying a first and foremost *non-disabled* child to term. Such positions are quite skeptical towards new reproductive technologies. The medical feminist ethicist Hille Haker, for example, has developed a complex perspective on neo-eugenics. She points out that the feelings of women who abort after having conducted prenatal testing are quite ambivalent. Questions of eugenics are also of high concern for her. Haker says:

> Does Caroline Stoller describe an 'act of selection'? To me this is not the appropriate way of describing the decision against bringing a child to term that lives with a grave an incurable disease in the 'belly' of a woman. More aptly, I believe, the selective effect plays a role but is not intended as such. When a pregnancy is terminated no position is to be taken regarding the value of this human life; the woman cannot however – nor can the father, the doctors, the nursing staff, the midwife, or society in general – avoid making a statement of value, implicitly at least (Haker 2001, 128; translation Samantha Taber).

A further strand in crip/disability studies approaches to reproductive issues deals with processes of exclusion from the category of a welcomed reproductive subject, with which people with disabilities are confronted. This strand is discussed in the next section.

What can trans/queer perspectives and crip/disability studies perspectives learn from each other?

All of the aforementioned trans/queer as well as (feminist) disability studies perspectives contain crucial gaps. In this final section, then, I will discuss these gaps and try to develop 'a trans-crip approach'. The usage of quotation marks indicates that my following thoughts do not constitute a fully developed intersectional theory, method or approach. To make this proposal of intersectionalizing transgender and crip approaches fully operative would mean carrying out qualitative research which integrates an intersectional perspective from the very beginning. To date, there are no approaches available which display such a complex and consistently applied intersectional perspective.

Even qualitative approaches in the field of disability and transgender studies which critically deal with reproductive subjectivation in the age of new reproductive technologies are difficult to find. So in the following last part of my contribution I take some of the key insights of each of the discussed fields as starting points for rereading critically some of the main ideas of the other field.

I start by looking at trans/queer approaches from a crip/disability studies perspective. Taking the above mentioned main impetus of trans/queer approaches, namely the positive embracement of NRTs, I claim that a crucial omission is a discussion of the neo-eugenic aspects of NRTs. Then I will look at crip/disability studies approaches and argue that one underlying feature of their critique on the denial of a reproductive identity is a heteronormative tone.

One regularly made assumption in trans/queer approaches to reproductive subjectivation is, as described above, that NRTs offer the possibility to destabilize heteronormative settings of gender, sexuality and kinship. For example, Cathy Griggers writes that the technology of cross-uterine egg transplants opens up a possibility for queer reproduction (Griggers 1994). Griggers refers to a process in which eggs are extracted from a reproductive body. This could be, as Griggers claims, the body of a lesbian woman. Extending her approach it could also be the body of a transman. Generally, these extracted eggs are fertilised by sperm outside the body, in vitro. Therefore this process is called in vitro fertilization. The fertilised egg is then transferred to the uterus of the same or of a different person with the intention of establishing a successful pregnancy. Griggers interprets this process as a destabilization of a heteronormative gender order, and supports the usage of new reproductive technologies.

However, when we take the above sketched disability studies critique on neo-eugenics into account, it becomes obvious that Griggers does not mention that there is also a neo-eugenic aspect to these processes. For between the transfer of the embryo from one reproductive body to another the ‘quality’ of the embryo is generally checked: The in vitro embryo is examined to determine whether it fulfills dominant societal norms of a healthy non-disabled future citizen. So the blind spot of such a trans/queer critique is the fact that these new reproductive technologies include neo-eugenic practices.

I will now turn to the question what crip/disability studies approaches could learn from trans/queer ideas; and argue that most work in crip/disability studies to reproductive subjectivation is based on heteronormative assumptions.

One major claim of crip/disability studies approaches to reproduc-

tive subjectivation is the denial of a 'full' reproductive status. In other words, the status of a 'reproductive subject' is not bestowed on people with disabilities, so that, in effect, motherhood and fatherhood does not seem to be an appropriate societal option for them (Waldschmidt 2003; Hermes 2004; Prilleltensky 2004, 55; Manz 2007; Onken 2008; Pixa-Kettner 2008). The ability to reproduce and bear offspring is understood by these commentators to represent an essential component of women's gender identity, and thus the glorification of motherhood is inextricably connected with the promise of social recognition. In other words, from the perspective of many women with disabilities, the appellation to be a reproductive subject appears not to be a burden but a privilege (Prilleltensky 2004, 54-55).

Some women with disability react towards these exclusions by embracing NRTs. From their perspective the usage of NRTs would enable them to lead a more 'normal' life (Krones 2005, 2006). Gisela Hermes for example shows that some women with disabilities are in favour of PND because the birth of a non-disabled child means the promise of being perceived less disabled by their environment: 'when the birth of a non-disabled child is tied to a disabled person's hope of coming a bit closer to normality and social acceptance, then the desire for the most perfect child possible comes to the fore' (Hermes 2004, 36).

Such a positive judgement of NRTs resembles the earlier sketched trans/queer positions. However, from a trans/queer perspective, which seeks the destabilization of heteronormative gender regimes, this postulation appears difficult. The consequence of it would be to install biogenetic motherhood or fatherhood as an inherent feature of a 'disabled identity'. Thus, the transcrip perspective on NRTs, that I suggest, would interrogate the identity of the reproductive subject and would not support a view of motherhood or fatherhood as an inherent feature of either a trans/queer or a crip identity.[15]

This would mean, for example, critically interrogating the above mentioned disability studies perspectives on neo-eugenics. The first strand of disability studies approaches displays a narrow perspective on eugenics by underlining the value of disabled people's lives and hence, the disabled embryo's value, while forgetting the fact that the 'life' of any embryo is always already embedded in socially constituted, gendered settings. These settings could also include the pregnancy of a transman or the fact that a transwoman fathers a child. In other words, to fight new forms of eugenics effectively the basis of heteronormative and ableist reproductive subjectivity must be better understood.

A critical trans/queer perspec-

tive would also interrogate positions such as Haker's which deal with a very specific, i.e. a *priviledged* reproductive identity. Feminist positions on new reproductive technologies do display an intersectional perspective, as they contain a feminist position and at the same time thematize neo-eugenics. However, they first and foremost engage with discrimination against non-disabled women. Furthermore, such perspectives ignore a transgender perspective and imply a heteronormative bias, as they take the intelligible woman and the heterosexual couple for granted. In sum: a trans-crip perspective would enrich German feminist and disability studies approaches to reproductive technologies, as questions of heteronormativity are often neglected in Germany and the German speaking countries (Raab 2007, 128, 138).

Finally, in an age of new technologies this would mean that biogenetic or heterosexual parenthood would not be considered as an ultimate aim, but instead a call for a more open reproductive subjectivation. Such an interrogation could have positive effects for people who benefit from the priviledge of being perceived as 'normal' - namely the heterosexual, non-disabled, married man or woman. It could mean creating structures in which it becomes possible to raise children beyond the nuclear heterosexual family or interrogating the pressure to have one's own biogenetical child. This could in turn for example lead to less pressure for the '38 year old childless woman' who feels excluded from her environment because she is the only one who does 'not have a child yet'.

What, then, has been the aim of this paper and what is its conclusion? This contribution to critical work on NRTs argues for a vibrant conversation about the technology between approaches in trans/queer and disability studies. Although each of these theoretical fields deals with the topic of reproduction, it does so with little or no reference to the insights of the others. Hence, I have attempted to show how notions of reproductive subjectivation could be extended in each field: the transgender debate about NRTs which is often limited to arguments about access to the technologies could be extended to consider questions about neo-eugenics. In return, the debate on eugenics and reproduction in the field of disability studies could be enriched by a broader understanding of the very category of disability.

Endontes

[1] Reproductive technologies in principle encompass all technologies which are used in the context of reproduction: abortion, contraception or techniques of 'self-fertilization' like the introduction of a tampon which has been soaked with sperm. In the following text, however, I use the term new reproductive technologies (NRTs) in a narrow sense

for a reproduction which is increasingly technologized. NRTs then refer to technological practices which 'technologically' intervene into the act of fertilization and pregnancy namely in-vitro fertilization, prenatal diagnostics or pre-implantation diagnostics.

[2] When I was doing my research on theoretical approaches to reproduction and new reproductive technologies there were no published articles available that could be located explicitly in the emerging 'field' of transgender studies (Stryker 2006; Haggerty and McGarry 2007). For this reason I refer to queer approaches and as necessary expand on them with perspectives from transgender researchers and activists. Transgender/queer or trans-crip, as I understand the terms, thus represent critical perspectives on heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is understood here as a framework based on a constitutive and hierarchizing relationship of binary conceptions of gender and of heterosexuality, in which reproduction is naturalised and assumed only when one has the 'correct' body, i.e. able bodied and heterosexual.

[3] In the past the term *crip* was used to humiliate people with disabilities. It has since been picked up and rearticulated by them (Clare 1999, 70; Sandahl 2003, 36). The term crip theory has not yet gained wide recognition in the academy (Sandahl 2003, 52). I employ it as the parallel to queer: *crip* is something that is done. It denaturalizes and transgresses notions of disability. Where disability politics aim at an acknowledgement of disabled identities (e.g. Riegler 2006), crip politics strives to produce anti-assimilationalist strategies and to eliminate these identities. I will use the term *trans/queer-crip* in order to encompass both perspectives as well as to ask how both of these categories influence and transform each other and what kind of differences or analogies they represent.

[4] For an extensive examination of the German situation regarding the law on transsexuality, review of jurisdiction and law literature see the publications of Adrian de Silva (2005), who is currently working on a comparative perspective on German and British legislation and surrounding debates. For a broad perspective on the law situation for trans persons see also Whittle (2002).

[5] This reveals a divergence of standpoints between transmen and intersexuals. Georg Klauda has underlined that, in contrast to transmen and transwomen, intersexuals reject the notion of an intelligible gender identity (Klauda 2002, 42). With reference to the TSG this is problematic in that, in the current legal practice, intersexuals are also regularly referred to the TSG (Kolbe 2008, 12).

[6] In my judgment what is manifested here is a well-justified rejection of the idealizing appropriations of gender approaches, which seek to find the hegemonic reproductive order undercutting subject par excellence in the pregnant transman.

[7] Brauckmann also interprets the removal of the uterus and ovaries as 'a significant encroachment on the physical integrity of a person' (Brauckmann 2002, 79).

[8] Even women who locate themselves as non-heterosexual are excluded by the prescriptions of the National Doctors' Chamber from using reproductive technologies (Bundesärztekammer 2006, 1400); homosexual men meanwhile are not allowed to donate to sperm banks (Daniels 2006, 74). Gays and lesbians however are not confronted with compulsory sterilization. The ideal reproductive subject is thus not only a person for whom a clear sex can be imagined but also one who exhibits a practice of desire that is directed toward the supposedly 'other sex'.

[9] For further discussions of sterilization in

the Weimar Republic, see Bock 1986; Usborne 1994; and Weingart et. al. 1988.

[10] The law was passed in July 1933. Its enactment was one of the first acts by Adolf Hitler after achieving control.

[11] The term 'Betreuung' refers to a form of guardianship without the precondition of an 'incapacitation' of the adult. The main impetus of the law is to strengthen the needs of the person in the case of legal support and representation. According to the law, the Betreuer has to find out and to obey the wishes of the disabled person, as long as they are not likely to be harmful for the disabled adult. Before taking important decisions on behalf of the person, the Betreuer shall try to find out and to discuss if possible the personal wishes of the disabled adult (Wagner-Stolp 2004).

[12] In *Gender Trouble*, Butler develops a queer perspective on the inherent heteronormativity of gene determination, the theory of the testisdetermining gene. In 1987, this gene was defined as the crucial gene, that was assumed to be responsible for sex development (Butler 1991, 159-160).

[13] For example, transgender associations like Transmann e.V. (2005) postulate the possibility, even after compulsory sterilization, of fathering their 'own,' that is biogenetical, child. New reproductive technologies are thus discussed as a possibility for fulfilling the wish for a biogenetical child, even after the surgical or hormonal intervention.

[14] I would like to thank Ulrike Schultz for this comment.

[15] Heike Raab postulates a *strategic* appropriation of gender identity in a disabling world which deprives people with disability of their erotic and sexual potentials (Raab 2007, 141), which could be extended to a critical-reflexive appropriation of a reproductive subjectivity. Raab deals extensively with heteronormativity but not with questions of reproduction. She also does not explicitly include transgender perspectives in her publication, but, I suspect, if asked she would certainly agree on the importance of a transgender perspective.

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GJSS Graduate Journal of Social Science

Contextualising Intersex: Ethical discourses on intersex in Sweden and the US

Erika Alm

As of the beginning of the 1990s the medical management of intersex has been up for debate, and the US has been the epicentre of debate. Scholars like Iain Morland and Anne Fausto-Sterling have identified three key actors in the U.S. context: clinicians, patient oriented support groups and intersex advocacy organisations, and feminist scholars with a critical perspective on the medical discourse surrounding sex and gender identity (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Morland 2004). There has been fairly little discussion about intersex rights in Sweden until the last couple of years. The budding Swedish discussions are all framed by international discourses, especially the U.S. discussions among clinicians on the pros and cons of the traditional treatment model, and the discussions between intersex people, intersex advocates, clinicians and politicians on intersex rights. However, while the U.S. discourses on intersex have been greatly affected by the participation of feminist scholars such influences have been scarce in Sweden. This article explores differences and similarities between the Swedish and the U.S. context, arguing that the relative lack of feminist scholarly attention to intersex has had consequences for the Swedish discussion.

Keywords: intersex, Sweden, U.S., feminist theory, DSD, ISNA, INIS, medical management of intersex

In the spring of 2008 an article titled 'Boy or Girl–Never Guess!' appeared in the Swedish medical journal *Läkartidningen*. The authors, some of Sweden's most prominent physicians working with the targeted group, called for changes in the management of children born with atypical sex characteristics (what is commonly called intersex or disorder of sex development).[1] They stressed the necessity to keep up with international discussions on intersex, and referred to the latest developments in the negotiations between clinicians and intersex advocates in the US as groundbreaking (Nordenström, et al. 2008, 629). However, a major actor in the US discussions was unnoticed by the Swedish physicians: feminist scholars working in alliance with intersex advocacy organisations. While the US discourses on intersex have been greatly affected by the participation of feminist scholars, such

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influences have been scarce in Sweden. This article explores the cultural specificity of intersex discourses and discussions, through a reading of the Swedish context in relation to the US one. The aim of this article is to give an outline of the discursive field in Sweden on questions of intersex rights, and to initiate a discussion on the necessity for feminist studies in Swedish material relating to intersex. I have used both texts – feminist studies carried out on the Swedish discourses of intersex, and articles written by Swedish clinicians and intersex advocacy organisations that discuss the situation in Sweden – and interviews for this study. The interviews with the key actors in the Swedish context will be presented in a forthcoming article.[2]

There has been fairly little discussion about intersex rights in Sweden until the last couple of years. It is not until recent years that the experiences of intersex people have reached the attention of the public via documentaries and interviews in the press, television and radio.[3] The budding Swedish discussions on intersex are all framed by international discourses, and especially the US discussions among clinicians on the pros and cons of the traditional treatment model, and the discussions between intersex people, intersex advocates, clinicians and politicians on intersex rights.

In light of the fact that the Swedish discourses on intersex have been so influenced by the US ones, I will start by providing an introduction to the US context, to set the background. Then I will focus on the specificity of the Swedish context, posing tentative questions like: is there something culturally specific about the Swedish medical and juridical management of intersex? Does the lack of Swedish feminist scholars discussing intersex limit the possibilities of an open and productive discussion about the medical, social and cultural management and representation of individuals not fitting the sexual dimorphic model?

Introduction – the US context

With the dissolution of ISNA (Intersex Society of North America) – the largest and most influential of the non-governmental organisations working for intersex rights in the US – and the simultaneous creation of Accord Alliance, ISNA's successor, in March 2008, a new discursive landscape on intersex is now forming. ISNA has, since its formation in 1993, had a key role in the development of an intersex movement internationally, and hence the US has been the country above all others where discussions on the medical management of intersex, and intersex rights, have flourished.

As of the beginning of the 1990s the medical management of intersex has been up for debate, mainly due to the media coverage on the life of David Reimer and the subsequent questioning of the man behind the

Reimer case, psychologist and sexologist John Money (Kessler 1998; Colapinto 2000; Fausto-Sterling 2000).[4] Money and his colleagues had dominated research on intersex since the late 1950s. The basis for the treatment model was an assemblage of heuristic assumptions: the primary one being that humans are born psychosexually neutral, which means that we are not born with a biologically determinate inclination for a specific gender identity, rather the gender identity develops as an effect of gender rearing and body image. This hypothesis led Money to conclude that children born with atypical sexual characters can develop a stable gender identity in the chosen sex, if the social rearing is consistent, and if their bodies are brought into alignment with the chosen sex, by means of surgical and/or hormonal treatment. Money's theories were well received by academics in the natural sciences as well as in human and social sciences. In *Lessons from the Intersexed* (1998) psychologist Suzanne J. Kessler testifies that she and other feminist researchers used Money's theories as heuristic tools to show that femininity and masculinity are socially constructed categories.[5] During the early 1990s a reassessment of the theory of psychosexual neutrality gained ground, most notably through the work of biologist and sex researcher Milton Diamond and the founders of ISNA. Diamond argued that there is no substantial evidence supporting the so-called Optimum Gender of Rearing model (OGR model), on the contrary there are many indications that the guidelines Money and his colleagues formulated are counterproductive. Diamond and ISNA stressed the same points: that early genital surgery often has serious medical consequences (severe scar tissue, loss of sensation etc), and that the secrecy surrounding intersex creates life long trauma and shame.[6] Cheryl Chase (now known as Bo Laurent) founded ISNA in 1993 as a direct reaction to the maltreatment of intersex people. Feminist researchers began to examine the culture-specific and deeply problematic assumptions about gender and identity that characterise Money's theories. Despite this critique, Money's legacy persists in US guidelines for the medical management of intersex (Dreger 1998; Kessler 1998; Fausto-Sterling 2000).

A trio: clinicians, intersex advocates, and scholars

David Reimer's story highlighted the ethical problems surrounding the management of intersex, and, as his story was told and retold by journalists, physicians, scholars and intersex advocates and activists, a general discussion about the pros and cons of the current standards of medical care developed. Three key actors can be identified in this discussion: practising physicians and other caretakers, patient ori-

ented support groups and intersex advocate organisations, and scholars interested in and critical of the medical discourses on sex and gender identity (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Morland 2004). When the *Human Rights Commission of the City and County of San Francisco* held an open hearing about intersex in May 2004, physicians, scholars, intersex people, parents of intersex children and intersex advocates and activists gave testimonies (Arana 2005). The explicit aim of the open hearing in San Francisco was to create a polyphonic discussion on intersex, leaving the endeavour for consensus behind. However, in other contexts the search for consensus is prevailing, and there are different opinions on who ought to be included in the formulation of consensus statements and clinical guidelines.

Two recent examples from the US reveal the discord. On the one hand we have a consensus statement on the management of intersex formulated during the International Conference in Paediatrics, in Chicago 2005. Despite the fact that the conference was attended not only by medical specialists but also by representatives of ISNA, the consensus statement stresses the importance of consensus *within* the medical practice and only mentions the necessity of a dialogue between parents, intersex individuals, and clinicians in passing (Lee, et al. 2006). On the other hand we have the *Clinical Guidelines for the Management of Disorders of Sex Development in Childhood* put forth by the Consortium on the Management of Disorders of Sex Development, in 2006. The Consortium is a project initiated by ISNA to give voice to the experiences of the so-called 'the DSD clinical triad': clinicians, intersex patients, and parents of intersex people. These guidelines echo the ones put forth by Milton Diamond and his psychiatrist colleague Keith Sigmundson in 1997. Diamond and Sigmundson formulated provisional guidelines challenging those implied by the OGR model for management for intersex. The new guidelines, which are in accordance with the demands for change put forth by ISNA, are described as a turn towards a patient oriented model of management (Diamond and Sigmundson 1997). Diamond and Sigmundson emphasise openness, honesty, peer support and professional counselling, and avoidance of early surgery.

Scientific controversies, silenced voices

Diamond and Sigmundson's article created a debate among professionals working with intersex, which focused on questions of expert knowledge and dependable methods, but also on ethical dilemmas. The controversy between the proponents of the OGR model and the ones challenging it is not necessarily one of scientific sustainability but rather of ethics. While the OGR

model is based on Money's studies, initially deemed as scientifically progressive but later questioned for being methodologically unreliable, the early calls for changes were mainly based on ethical grounds, only partly supported by scientific arguments from medical and sociological studies (Ford 2001). More recent critiques point out that there are no scientific studies that can validate the assumptions that atypical genitals are a psychosocial risk factor and that early surgeries are necessary measures (Dreger and Herndon 2009, 204). Despite the lack of scientific studies – especially of follow-up studies on intersex adults – supporting the traditional model of treatment, intersex advocates initially had great difficulty in making the reformist perspective seem credible and justifiable to clinicians (Chase 2003).

The inability of some clinicians to take the perspective of intersex individuals into account seems to hinge on the question of scientific credibility, and representativity as a methodological problem. *A recent example*: faced with the draft of the report from the Human Rights Commission of the City and County of San Francisco, a paediatric urologist questioned the objectivity and political rationale of the Commission, arguing that the report was politicised towards the reformist perspective and not based on enough clinical evidence. He claimed that the intersex patients he had met and treated were satisfied with the outcome of the treatment (Arana 2005, 205). The critical narratives of intersex people are, in this context, read as individual testimonies, not having any bearing on the opinions and sentiments of the larger group of intersex individuals.

Intersex individuals are rarely heard in the controversy on their own terms, other than as witnesses referred to second hand, as subaltern voices articulated only by others. The texts in the anthology *Intersex in the Age of Ethics* (1999) are somewhat of an exception. Cultural theorist Iain Morland argues that the conversation preferred in the US context is one between experts: professionals that are experts in their field (whether this be endocrinology, psychiatry, history or intersex advocacy) (Morland 2004). Within such a professionalised context intersex narratives are marginalised. However, in recent years the Internet has provided new fora for intersex people to write their own histories, as several scholars and activists have pointed out (Sytsma 2006; Dreger and Herndon 2009).[7] Peer support groups and intersex advocacy organisations are affected and reconstituted by the technoscientific changes. They are no longer limited to regional networks, but are globalised on micro-, meso- and macro-level as intersex individuals share their stories on personal blogs, internet communities, and homepages for intersex advocacy

organisations, revealing patterns in intersex narratives that affect the lobby work of these organisations, lobby work that eventually disseminates back on to the micro-level as information on intersex rights spread through virtual fora.[8]

So far this is all about the US context, but what about Sweden? The article in *Läkartidningen* mentioned earlier was a sign of intersex rights becoming a pressing issue for a larger group than those born with atypical sex characteristics. When RFSU (the Swedish Association for Sexual Education) arranged a seminar on intersex in October 2007 with participants from the medical professions and the intersex support group INIS (Intersexuals in Sweden), it was the first time physicians and intersex advocates met for an open debate. Although a modest arrangement, the seminar served as a platform for a wider discussion. Since then INIS has had a continuous communication with the clinicians, developing a dialogue on the pros and cons of the current model of treatment. This dialogue is influenced by the US discussion between clinicians and intersex people and advocates; the contact with ISNA was a trigger in the founding of INIS, and INIS as an organisation has learned from the experiences of ISNA.[9] The Swedish physicians work within an internationalised milieu, constituted by international conferences and international journals, resulting in international guidelines and consortia. One of the clinicians working in collaboration with INIS, attended the International Conference in Paediatrics in Chicago 2005, and helped to formulate the consensus statement on management of intersex; she is also one of the authors of the article in *Läkartidningen* (Lee, et al. 2005).

If we are interested in studying the specificity of the Swedish context, it is imperative to remember the fact that INIS (currently the only intersex advocacy organisation that takes a comprehensive and critical grip on intersex rights and the management of intersex in Sweden) is a relatively young and by US standards very small organisation. In the US ISNA worked in affiliation with scholars and clinicians to put intersex on the political agenda, and has been a lobby organisation to be reckoned with. Their demands for change, which were initially met with little respect and interest, have resulted in a reform of the standards of care on an international level. ISNA was an established interlocutor in the ethical discourse on intersex. In Sweden, the situation is different; INIS is still in the start-up phase, without financial resources and without political influence in terms of large numbers of members. INIS is dependent on the goodwill of the medical community for its participation in the discussion on intersex. Naturally there are differences in the way these organisations have approached the subject at hand.

It is also imperative to acknowledge that the Swedish context does not lack critical voices; INIS has played a significant role in putting intersex rights on the agenda, partly through fora presented by two NGOs: RFSU and RFSL (the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights). Being non-governmental organisations, dedicated to the education of sexual rights and sexual health, RFSU and RFSL have made intersex rights part of their programme for change, trying to create awareness through encouraging parliamentarians to write motions to the government, formulating policy statements, writing in-house reports on intersex rights, and arranging seminars. Focusing on activism, the annual Stockholm Pride has had seminars and workshops on intersex rights and experiences the last couple of years, in collaboration with INIS. However, as mentioned earlier, feminist scholars, identified as one of three major actors in the US context, have hitherto played a limited part in the Swedish discussions on intersex.

Epistemological interventions

In the spring issue of GLQ 2009, titled *Intersex and After*, some of the leading scholars, clinicians and activists framed the future questions and challenges of the intersex rights movement. Alice Domurat Dreger and April Herndon focused on the role of feminist scholars in the progress of the movement, both having worked with ISNA for several years. Dreger and Herndon claim that the involvement of feminist scholars has been imperative for the progress of the intersex movement (Dreger and Herndon 2009, 218). While feminist scholars from a range of disciplines have acted on the lack of critical discussion on intersex management in the US – the first generation of critics consisting mainly of biologists, sociologists, and historians (Fausto-Sterling 1993; Dreger 1998; Kessler 1998; Preves 1998), the second including jurists, psychologists, and cultural theorists (Ford 2001; Roen 2004; Greenberg 2006; Morland 2005)[10] – the situation is different in Sweden. It is no coincidence that feminist researchers are not mentioned as possible interlocutors in the article in *Läkartidningen*. Although there are theoretical discussions on intersex in Swedish feminist academia, there are hardly any studies relating to the specificity of the Swedish management of intersex. Two fairly recent doctoral theses examine the management of intersex in Sweden from a norm-critical perspective, informed by feminist theories: Sara Edenheim's *Begärets lagar* (2005) and Erika Alm's '*ett emballage för inälvor och emotioner*' (2006). Both focus first and foremost on juridical issues, analysing the governmental report that formulated the guidelines for the current legislation on sex change and sex assignment in intersex chil-

dren, *Intersexuellas könstillhörighet* (1968). Since then a couple of academic articles have been published (Zeiler and Wickström 2009; Zeiler and Malmqvist 2010), and there are several research projects recently started.

However, since intersex rights and experiences have been on the Swedish feminist academic agenda for less than a decade, the majority of the studies done on Swedish material are written by pioneering students: mainly master's theses and undergraduate term papers written in sociology, gender studies, ethnology and political science. Most of these studies analyse popularised medical texts, such as diagnostic descriptions of intersex conditions, or the governmental report previously mentioned, *Intersexuellas könstillhörighet*. The preferred method is discourse analysis and the theoretical inspirations often come from Michel Foucault's theories on biopower and Judith Butler's theories on gender as performative. Although theoretically well informed, the authors tend to make the assumption that the Swedish medical discourse on intersex and the impact it has had on patients can be equated with the situation in the US. For example, Swedish physicians have described the Swedish standards of care as patient oriented, focusing on individual adaption and functionality rather than aesthetic adjustments (Nordenström, et al. 2008). Such descriptions have been denounced as false in the socio-cultural studies done on Swedish material, with reference to the life stories of intersex people from the US context.[11] The study most frequently referred to is Suzanne Kessler's *Lessons from the intersex* (1998), which is comprised of case studies from the late 1980s and early 1990s. Many of the Swedish studies seem to assume that the cultural differences between contemporary Sweden and the US Kessler describes are possible to transcend and ignore, despite the fact that the authors of these studies often rely on theoretical work that argues that the pathologisation of intersex people is based on socially constructed and variable standards of normality. In other words, these studies highlight the culture-specific and context-bound aspects of pathologisation of intersex on a theoretical basis, but downplay the potential cultural and social differences between Sweden and the US in the actual analysis. There is a tendency to analyse the Swedish material without taking into account its specific social and cultural contexts, this is true of the doctoral theses mentioned earlier as well. A comparative study on the differences and similarities between Sweden and USA could provide a more nuanced perspective, giving the analysis of the Swedish discourses on intersex a depth it is lacking.

In following my example above, I propose that in addition to criticising the Swedish management of inter-

sex by drawing parallels to studies done on US material, we need to examine critically the culture-specific and time-specific aspects of it. The description of the Swedish standards of care as patient oriented and more focused on achieving a social adjustment in the assigned sex than pushing for surgery on aesthetic grounds, put forth by contemporary clinicians, has a history. It echoes passages in *Intersexuellas köntillhörighet* to the very phrasing. The Swedish Physicians Association writes, in its referral response to the report, that it is more important to take the child's psychosexual development into account than it is to pay heed to morphology and the possibilities of reconstructive surgery, and the commissioners note that one risks making the child's situation worse if major surgery is performed early in life (Referral response from the Swedish Physicians Association 1968; *Intersexuellas könstillhörighet* 1968, 30; Alm 2006). There are other aspects of the governmental report that are also interesting when read in the light of the US context. In the passage describing international standards of care the commissioners express scepticism towards John Money's theories of psychosexual neutrality, a doubt stemming from an interest in the neuropsychological aspects of the development of gender identity. Keeping in mind that the report is written in 1968, when Money's theories where the foundations of the international standard of care, this is quite remarkable. However, when push comes to shove the commissioners decide to follow the international guidelines. This inconsistency is most likely an effect of what Alice Domurat Dreger has characterised as the conservatism of medical management of intersex: 'the move in the early twentieth century to assigning a 'workable' gender instead of a gender that aligned with a biological 'true sex' was a conservative reaction to the unrelenting messiness of sex' (Dreger and Herndon 2009, 214-215).

Political implications, cultural critics

Does this lack of critical and contextualising studies on Swedish intersex discourses limit the possibilities of an open and productive discussion about the medical, social and cultural management and representation of individuals who do not fit the sexual dimorphic model? Let's take two examples as a point of departure for the discussion on what is missing in the Swedish discussion: the introduction of and reactions to the term *disorder of sex development*, and the hesitance among some intersex people to take part in the critical discourse questioning the norms and regulations that constitute sex and gender dimorphism.

Disorder of sex development is, as of a couple of years, the preferred term among the majority of clini-

cians and some activists working with intersex. In the discussions preceding the change of terminology – established in the consensus statement formulated at the International Conference on Paediatrics in Chicago 2005 – a multitude of arguments have been put forth. Physicians have talked about the need for a terminology that focuses on the biological conditions underlying intersex diagnoses; parents with intersex children have described terms like intersex and hermaphrodite as offensive, leading people to believe that individuals with atypical sex are in between sexes, freaks of nature (Reis 2007; Feder 2009). ISNA took a firm stance in advocating DSD, claiming it is a term that connotes the medical context within which all intersex lives are framed. DSD is thought to be preferable to intersex since intersex in addition to being a generic term for a variety of medical diagnoses, has been used as an identity category. ISNA had previously pursued identity politics in the name of intersex, arguing that all intersex individuals share certain experiences based on the sole fact that they deviate from the socially constructed norms of sex and gender dimorphism. ISNA later toned down the identity politics, arguing that identity politics do more harm than good (ISNA, on line; Turner 1999). In a US context the drawbacks of pursuing recognition for intersex identity – the most obvious obstacles being that one runs the risk of portraying the group represented as homogeneous in a generalising manner, and that one might be perceived as too radical to make alliance with by clinicians and politicians – might outweigh the advantages. In the words of Dreger and Herndon: 'the shift to this terminology [DSD] clearly has allowed serious progress toward patient-centred care, in part because it has allowed alliance building across support and advocacy groups, and with clinicians.' (Dreger and Herndon 2009, 212).

Intersex people have voiced both critique and appreciation of the new term. Some are happy to make use of a word that de-emphasises identity politics and frames the issues at hand in a medical, biological context, others object to the pathologisation of atypical sex inherent in the very term *disorder of sex development* and mourn the political, critical potential of the terms lost, reminding us of the subversive use of *hermaphrodite* in the cocky and empowering newsletter *Hermaphrodites with an attitude*, written by members of ISNA (Reis 2007). The members of international intersex advocacy organisation OII (Organisation Intersex International) argue that the controversy surrounding the introduction of DSD is not only a matter of terminology but also a matter of politics. They have many objections to the new term and the guidelines presented by the Consortium on the Management of Disorders of Sex

Development, among other things pointing out that the guidelines are US centred, and that large groups of intersex people feel that they did not get to have their say in the revisions of the guidelines (OII, online). Feminist scholars have objections as well, Elizabeth Reis, among others, argues that terminology inevitably influences not only the conceptualisation of atypical sex but also the medical, juridical, social, and cultural management and representation of the people affected, and that it is problematic to use a term that includes the stigmatising word 'disorder' (Reis 2007).

What about the Swedish context, where intersex rights have not been on the political or academic agenda until recently? The clinicians argue that the Swedish terminology needs to be in accordance with the international policy, for a comprehensive and ethically informed management of intersex to be possible (Nordenström, et al. 2008). INIS embraced the change in terminology, and the underlying arguments, from the start. INIS has never had identity politics on the agenda. This is probably due to the fact that the contemporary discourses on intersex differ from those of the early 1990s. INIS has not met the same resistance ISNA did, Swedish clinicians have explicitly asked for relations of collaboration and alliance. A member of INIS compares INIS not with ISNA but with Accord Alliance, ISNA's successor.[12] Accord Alliance, founded by some of the people behind ISNA, focuses on collaboration between the actors in the DSD triad, leaving identity politics and advocacy behind (Accord Alliance, on line; ISNA, on line).

In the Swedish context another question of terminology has sparked a discussion, which provides a different perspective on the problems at hand. RFSL introduced the term trans person as part of their queer sexual politics. The term was an attempt to find a Swedish word to encompass all those individuals whose gender identity or gender expression partly or completely, momentarily or permanently, differ from the sex assigned to them at birth, individuals that challenge the sex and gender norms of our times. The term includes: 'drag queens, drag kings, intersexuals, transgenderists, transsexuals and transvestites' (RFSL, on line). The term was well received in academia and among many queer activists; however, some objected to the broad scope of the term. Benjamin, a national patient organisation for transsexuals, has protested on several occasions, arguing that transsexuals have nothing in common with transvestites and transgenderists; and that their cause – to be accepted as women and men, and to not have to fight for medical and juridical reassignment – is hindered by the association with gender benders (Benjamin, on line). Some Swedish intersex individuals have reacted in

a similar way when confronted with the term, claiming that there are more important issues at hand than taking a discursive, norm-critical perspective on intersex, and that it is essential to pay heed to the differences among the groups lumped together in the term.[13] In other words, at least some intersex individuals have second thoughts on engaging in the larger critical discourse questioning the norms and regulations that constitutes sex and gender dimorphism, and heteronormativity.[14] This hesitation needs to be taken into account and respected.

I believe that the debate on the pros and cons of the 'trans person' term would benefit from the meta-perspective on sex and gender discourses associated with feminist scholars. The specificity of the Swedish context has yet to be systematically studied, and methodological and theoretical approaches influenced by feminist STS-studies and cultural studies – the equivalent of studies done on US and U.K. contexts by Fausto-Sterling, Kessler, Dreger, Preves, Hird, Morland, Roen, etc – would contribute greatly to this task. We need to try to answer basic questions like: who gets to have their voice articulated in the discourses on intersex in Sweden, on what subjects and raising which types of questions, in which fora? These types of questions are seldom posed in the discussions between clinicians and intersex organisations, because there are more urgent issues. One might think of it as a division of labour: feminist scholars can contribute with perspectives otherwise unmentioned. In addressing these questions it is important to pay heed to the guidelines Dreger and Herndon propose for feminists interested in fighting for intersex rights: 1) listen to intersex people carefully, not assuming that you know what is right or true for them, 2) write about intersex people on their own terms, rather than using them as representations of for example the social construction of gender, 3) do more than theorise, help fundraising or work with advocacy organisations (Dreger and Herndon 2009, 218).[15] Understanding intersex rights as a feminist matter of concern raises questions of trustworthiness and accountability. Perhaps one can approach these issues by regarding trustworthiness as a matter of engagement rather than consent or representativity (Scheman 2001). Scholars interested in putting intersex rights on the feminist agenda in Sweden have reasons to consider the relations between theoretical work and advocacy work since there has been little contact between the two types of discourses in the Swedish context. Sara Edenheim's and Curtis Hinkle's (founder of OII) article in the Swedish feminist journal Bang, that stresses the importance of Swedish feminists participating in the fight for intersex rights, is one of the few (Edenheim and

Hinkle 2005).

Regardless of the terminology – whether we use 'DSD' in accordance with Accord Alliance, INIS and scholars like Dreger and Herndon, or 'intersex' like OII and scholars like Reis – I believe that the possibilities incorporated in the broader and more politicised discussions ISNA and its associates initiated during the 1990s need to be actualised in the Swedish context. From a feminist perspective the question of intersex rights is also a question of what it means to not fit the dominant sexual dimorphic model. One of the reasons why the study of intersex management from a discursive perspective – as an effect of specific cultural restrictions and norms on sex, gender, sexuality, and identity – is needed is the fact that said restrictions and norms affect us all. As gender variant visual artist Del LaGrace Volcano puts it:

> I feel that the key issue facing the intersexed is actually a key issue facing humanity in general: *fear of difference* and compulsory heterosexuality as well as gender normativity. For society to function as it does, it is essential that there be clear lines of demarcation between those that have (power) and those that do not... Those who rock the boat, who either cannot or will not conform to expectations, especially of what it means to be a man or a woman, are usually not rewarded except under extremely limited conditions. (Creighton, et al. 2009, 253)

Endnotes

[1] *A note on the terminology*: There is no consensus on the terminology in cases of atypical sex development. The term *intersexualism* was used during the larger part of the twentieth century by clinicians and intersex people, advocates, and activists. However intersexualism has never been a diagnostic term, it is an umbrella term for several types of medical diagnoses, and there has been great dispute on which diagnoses ought to be included. The terms *intersex, intersex person, person with intersex condition* and their likes, have been put forth by intersex people, activists, and advocates as alternatives, in an attempt to find words that do not contribute to the misconception that intersex has something to do with sexual orientation (Dreger and Herndon 2009). Recent discussions between clinicians and intersex advocates have resulted in a change in terminology, with the introduction of the term *disorder of sex development*. The pros and cons of this terminological shift, put forth within the international discussions, will be discussed later in this article. I will use the terms *intersex* and *intersex people* as these are the ones used by some of the intersex people active in intersex advocacy and the leading feminist scholars, and they still have a norm-critical connotation. Alice Domurat Dreger and April Herndon use the following definition of intersex: 'We define a person as intersex if she or he was born with a body that someone decided isn't typical for males or females' (Dreger and Herndon 2009, 200).

[2] The key actors identified are INIS (intersex advocacy organisation), clinicians working with the management of intersex, RFSU, and RFSL (both NGOs dedicated to the ed-

ucation of sexual rights and sexual health, and with intersex rights on the agenda).

[3] In the aftermath of the media storm surrounding the South African 2009 Olympic winner Caster Semenya, Swedish newspapers, television and radio stations featured intersex people, describing their life stories and raising questions of awareness.

[4] David Reimer's story is also known as the Joan/John case. Reimer, born in Canada in 1965, was not intersex, but had his penis completely obliterated at the age of 8 months, as a circumcision went wrong. His parents were advised by John Money to raise Reimer as a girl, and a gender reassignment was implemented when Reimer was 22 months, followed by genital surgery and hormonal therapy. Money used Reimer as a case study in his research on gender identity in intersex children, claiming that the reassignment was a success. It was not until 1980 that Reimer was informed about the circumstances of his childhood, and at that point he, who had never identified as a girl, decided to act out his male gender identity, and lived the rest of his life as a man. In the late 1990s Reimer's story came to the attention of the public with the publication of several academic articles and popular books questioning Money's involvement and judgement. See for example: John Colapinto. *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who was Raised as a girl* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), or Judith Butler. "Doing Justice to Someone: Sex reassign Movement and Allegories of Transsexuality" *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[5] It is primarily in the groundbreaking *Gender: An ethnomethodological approach* (New York: University of Chicago Press, 1978), co-written by Kessler and Wendy McKenna, that Money is used.

[6] In accordance with the OGR model many clinicians have advised parents of intersex children not to inform their children about the condition at hand, or the reasons behind treatments performed. David Reimer's story of how he discovered the truth about his early years in life echoes the life stories of several generations of intersex people.

[7] The plethora of virtual fora for intersex peer support – personal blogs, internet communities, homepages for intersex advocacy organisations such as ISNA and OII, patient support groups etc – has developed in parallel with the other virtual fora for support and advocacy, such as the virtual transgender communities.

[8] For a discussion on how patient support groups are reconstituted by the technoscientific changes associated with internet, see: Adel Clarke, et al. 'Biomedicalization: Techoscientific Transformations of Health, Illness, and US Biomedicine', *American Sociological Review* 68 (2003). Clark et al discuss the fact the changes in information and knowledge processes disrupt the division between expert and lay knowledge, but also note that some groups are excluded altogether by the digitalisation of medical knowledge; the diversity processes work in stratifying ways (Clarke, et al. 2003, 177-178).

[9] Interview with Jenny Ottosson, chairperson for INIS, 09/03/2010.

[10] Not all of these scholars are US based, but they use US material and examples from the US context. Some of them have done studies on other national contexts as well. The concept of contexualising intersex discourses has nothing to do with the nationality of the scholars conducting the studies, but with the specificity of the cultural and social context discussed.

[11] There are exceptions: in Henrik Hirseland's 'Den lämpligaste könstillhörigheten' (2003) and Cattis Grant's 'Mångsidiga kroppar' (2003) the voices are those of Swed-

ish intersex people. And Lisa Guntham is conducting an interview study on Swedish intersex adolescents.

[12] Interview with Jenny Ottosson, chairperson for INIS, 09/03/2010.

[13] Interview with Jenny Ottosson, chairperson for INIS, 09/03/2010. Dreger and Herndon point out that some transgender people wish to be defined as intersex since there are certain advantages with an intersex diagnosis as opposed to one of transsexualism for example, at least in the US context: 'people in the United States tend to be more accepting of identities that have a definite (or at least implied) biological basis. The current *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (*DSM-IV) provide another reason for transgender people to seek the intersex label. According to the DSM-IV, a person with atypical gender identity can be classed as having gender identity disorder only if the person is not intersex. Thus being labelled with an intersex condition means avoiding the diagnosis of a 'mental disorder' and possibly easier access to legal and medical sex reassignment' (Dreger and Herndon 2009, 213).

[14] *Sex and gender dimorphism*: the assumption that humans are physically and mentally dimorph, either male or female, and that an individual's sex and gender are in accordance within one another, i.e. what is sometimes called *cissexed* and *cisgendered* within transgender studies (Green 2006).

[15] Dreger and Herndon have a fourth point as well: acknowledge that intersex and transgender people often have suffered more by sexism and heterosexism than most biologically typical women (Dreger and Herndon 2009, 218). These guidelines resemble those points articulated by Jacob Hale on the subject of non-transsexuals or non-transgender people writing on transsexualism or transgender (Hale 1997).

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GJSS Graduate Journal of Social Science

Screen-births: Exploring the transformative potential in trans video blogs on YouTube

Tobias Raun

The article takes its point of departure in Tobias Raun's PhD research, exploring the numerous amounts of video blogs (vlogs) on YouTube where trans people (using hormones and/or surgery to alter their body) document and discuss their gender transition. The article offers a characterisation of the vlog medium as it is being put to use by the trans people, arguing that the vlog operates as both a diary, an autobiography, and as a vehicle of communication and social connection. Furthermore, Tobias Raun raises questions like: What kind of possibilities do a new media like vlogs enable in connection to represent and negotiate the meaning of trans identity? Can the trans vlogs enable a sense of empowerment and help create political visibility and political action?

Keywords: Transgender Studies, Transsexuality, Video Blogs, Internet Research, Participatory Culture, Self-Representation, Autobiography.

> 'So today is my first day, being born, I guess' ("Wheeler", 18 years old FtM, USA)

This article takes as its point of departure the numerous amounts of video blogs (vlogs) on YouTube (youtube.com) where transsexuals (using hormones and/or surgery to alter their body) document and discuss their gender transition. The transition is often articulated as a birth or a re-birth signalling a new start in life and a new identity. 'Trans-' in its many meanings and configurations seems to be a suitable name for these vlogs as well as a fruitful and thought-provoking frame for engaging with them. In this article I will touch upon 'trans' in three different ways, as an identity category (transsexual), as a movement of becoming (transitioning) and as a characterisation of the vlog medium (transmedia). I will argue that the vlog operates as something in-between an autobiography, a diary, and a vehicle of communication and social connection. The questions that I will pursue are: how are these various forms of –'trans-' played out in the vlogs and what might the transformative potential be?

'Broadcast Yourself': Introduction to the research context

The trans vlogs are rapidly in-

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creasing on the multimedia platform YouTube. YouTube as a platform was officially launched 'with little public fanfare in June 2005' (Burgess and Green 2009a, 1), as it started off as a video-sharing site run by three students (van Dijck 2009, 42). Google acquired YouTube in October 2006 and by early 2008 it was in the top ten most visited websites globally. In the early days YouTube carried the byline 'Your Digital Video Repository' but today it has been changed to 'Broadcast Yourself' – a shift from the website as a personal storage facility to a platform for self-expression (Burgess and Green 2009a, 2-4). YouTube is a 'messy' platform, containing a wide variety of movie clips, TV clips, and music videos from traditional media sources, as well as user-created content like vlogs. According to Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, YouTube is 'a site of participatory culture' (Burgess and Green 2009a, vii). Participatory culture is a term introduced by Henry Jenkins to describe what he calls the paradigmatic shift in media culture towards increased participation and democratisation (Jenkins 2006). As Jenkins states: 'Audiences ... are demanding the right to participate within culture' (Jenkins 2006, 24). More accessible digital technologies and a platform for sharing the user-created content enable potentially everybody to express them self and 'talk back'. Vlogs are fairly cheap and technically easy to use and produce, generally requiring nothing more than a webcam and basic editing skills. According to the recent study of YouTube done by Burgess and Green, vlogging is a dominant form of user-created content among the 'Most Discussed' and 'Most Responded' clips on YouTube. Thus, vlogging is 'an emblematic form of YouTube participation' (Burgess and Green 2009b, 94). The vlogs can also be seen as part of what Nicole Matthews has characterized as a broader 'confessional culture' (Matthews 2007, 435), including media genres such as blogging, television talkshows, reality television and a phenomenon like webcams.

Meeting the YouTubers[1]: Internet methodology and research ethics

I came across the trans vlogs when I was searching for information and visualisations of bodily transformations with the use of hormones in order to prepare myself for my own transition. I used search words such as 'trans', 'transgender', 'transman', 'transwoman', 'FtM' (Female-to-Male), "MtF" (Male-to-Female), etc. My presumption was that I would find very few examples of people uploading their gender transition, but to my surprise there were several. Furthermore I discovered that YouTubers had started to vlog about their transition around 2006/2007 and by now it was a genre in itself with certain characteristics. A model seemed to have been developed

regarding how to address the audience, how to appear or present yourself on screen and how to document and discuss the transition. The first YouTuber I met was 'Jan' testing his new voice while singing and 'Erica' talking about her 'Transgender Life'. They popped up when I typed the above-mentioned search words and I clicked my way into their 'personal channel page' where I saw the rest of their vlogs. The channel page serves as a personal profile designed to display a short personal description, thumbnails of videos the YouTuber has uploaded, members to whom the YouTuber subscribes, videos from other members the YouTuber has picked as favourites, lists of members who are the YouTuber friends and subscribers and a section where other people can leave comments. This personal channel page often coexists with a MySpace profile, a webpage/homepage and a regular blog elsewhere. This means that these people's experiences and resources are spread across a variety of media platforms offering different points of entry for different audience segments with the result that there is 'no one single source or text where one can turn to gain all of the information' (Jenkins 2007, 1).

Some YouTubers have uploaded three vlogs, others three hundred, some stop after a couple of months, others continue for several years. I have been watching the 945 vlogs uploaded by 'Jan', 'Erica', 'Henry', 'Wheeler', 'Simon', 'Claire', 'Jonathan' and 'Larry' and an infinite number of other vlogs that I came across while browsing YouTube trying to get an overview of the phenomenon. There is a strong prevalence of young white American trans people blogging about their life, which corresponds to some of the critiques that have been raised against the democratising promise of 'participatory culture'. YouTube is US-dominated (Burgess and Green 2009a, 82) and not very racially diverse (Alexander 2002b, 101-102: Jenkins 2009, 124;).

Doing Internet research like mine raises important and interlinked questions regarding methodology and ethics. Internet research ethics is an evolving and much debated academic field in itself[2], which outlines the ethical complexities and implications of conducting research online. Most ethical guidelines seem to agree that it is ethically responsible to do research without informed consent and/or use of pseudonyms if the material 'is open and available for everyone, that everyone with an Internet connection can access, and that does not require any form of membership or registration' (Sveningsson Elm 2009, 75). However, if the content is highly sensitive (and/or perceived as private by the users) and the subject is vulnerable, one should consider getting informed consent and/or anonymise the user (cf. note 2). I have notified the Danish Data Protection

Agency about the research that I am conducting and have been given permission. The Danish Data Protection Agency is a state institution providing juridical permission, protecting individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data. I am following their guidelines stating that I do not have to obtain informed consent, but that I need to anonymise the vloggers when publishing my material (unless I have been given permission from the vloggers). Thus, in what follows I will elaborate on what such guidelines entail and on my own considerations in this regard.

Youtube is indeed a publicly accessible archive promoting itself as 'the world's most popular online video community', inciting 'you' to Broadcast Yourself. Uploading a video on YouTube is a form of consent, it may not be informed, but it is nevertheless a form of consent where you agree that millions of people are allowed to watch and discuss your vlog, including researchers. However, the personal/confessional articulations of gender and sexuality in the vlogs contain material too sensitive to be studied without obscuring the users. This was the reasoning by The Danish Data Protection Agency. One could add that the trans vloggers might experience the platform as a semi-private forum even though it is public. Thus, the trans vloggers address a selection of audiences (fellow trans, queer or trans-curious people), a 'counter public' (Warner 2002), while at the same time reaching out to a larger global audience in order to create awareness and advocacy for trans-related issues and in order to make their voices heard. The personal mode of the vlogs, that according to The Danish Data Protection Agency is material too sensitive to be connected to identifiable individuals, could be perceived as part of a shift towards an increasing acceptance to expose one self and one's private matters in public and especially on the Internet (e.g. Warner 2002; Berlant 2008). However, one also needs to take into consideration that studying trans people is a contested field, given the long history of exploitive and harmful research done especially by non-trans people. Jacob Hale's 'Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans' (Hale 1997/ongoing) is a reminder of this history, but also an admonition to all researchers, trans or not, to engage with this field of study with a discerning mind and compassionate heart. Changing the YouTubers usernames and not stating their hometown takes into account that some may feel personally and emotionally exposed. However, anonymising the trans vlogger's username (which often is not their real name) can potentially contribute to the transphobic myth that being trans is something you should hide

or of which you should be ashamed. Not allowing the vloggers a name can seem complicit with pathologising and infantilisation of trans people. As Kathleen O'Riordan and E. H. Bassett state: 'the decision to disguise online activity, justified through a rhetoric of 'protection' may result in furthering the unequal power relations of media production by blocking full representation of alternative media' (O'Riordan & Bassett 2002, 12). It may also fail to credit the trans vloggers with the technological and social expertise that can operate in the field (see O'Riordan 2010).

A prevalent perception and marketing of the Internet is as a 'space' that is peopled and inhabited, and where researchers are studying and observing human actors. This has led to the widespread application of the human subject research model, that regards the rights of the human subject as primary and the aims of the researcher as secondary (O'Riordan and Bassett 2002; White 2002). However, the Internet is also a form of cultural production and publication, which makes it important to acknowledge the highly mediated and constructed aspects of these representations. The representation/text cannot unproblematically be conflated with the human subject appearing in and producing it (O'Riordan and Bassett 2002; White 2002). An important example of this is the case of the vlogger Bree, better known as lonelygirl15, who became famous for her apparently very emotional and impassioned posts about her parents and friends, but it turned out that the vlogs were a filmmaking experiment by independent producers Mesh Flinders and Miles Beckett (Burgess & Green 2009a, 27-30). I am not suggesting that the trans vloggers are not real, but I am implying that any appearance on the Internet is mediated and must be studied as such. As a visual culture theorist my analytical approach is interdisciplinary, thus taking its prime point of departure in media studies and gender studies, analysing how trans people narrate and visualise the encounter with and experience of transitioning processes and technologies.

Trans as a stigmatised position

The increased possibility of participation in media culture enables trans people to take charge of their own representation. The need and the urge to do so might emanate from the fact that trans people have to submit themselves to psychological evaluations and a system of pathologizing labels before access is granted to medical treatments, which then allow for a legal change in gender status. In spite of the fact that transsexuality is an official psychopathology, 'treatments' are not covered by health insurance in the United States (Stryker 2008), but they are in countries such as Denmark, Sweden and the UK. However, many choose to seek

support elsewhere and fund the transition themselves (Ringkøbing 2006) because 'the diagnosis works as its own social pressure, causing distress, establishing wishes as pathological, intensifying the regulation and control of those who express them in institutional settings' (Butler 2004, 99). As the queer theorist Judith Butler sums it up: 'one has to submit to labels and names, to incursions, to invasions; one has to be gauged against measures of normalcy; and one has to pass the test.' … The price of using the diagnosis to get what one wants is that one cannot use the language to say what one really thinks is true. One pays for one's freedom' (Butler 2004, 91).

When it comes to representation, trans individuals have often been exploited and sensationalised by others with little concern for the lives and perspectives of the trans people themselves (Shrage 2009, 5). However, the mainstream media's coverage of MtFs (Male to Female) is increasing. This increase in visibility is noticeable in reality programmes such as Americas Next Top Model, featuring Isis, and in I want a famous face, featuring Gia Darling who wants to look like Pamela Anderson. In the dating show There is something about Miriam a transwoman is the star of the programme, as six men are wooing 21-year-old Mexican model, Miriam. Only in the final episode is it 'revealed' to the men that she is a trans woman. Clearly being trans is here portrayed as being somehow duplicitous. The FtM (Female to Male) Thomas Beatie has also hit the headlines as 'The Pregnant Man', appearing on several talkshows and supermarket tabloids. Despite the different ways of portraying these trans people, I tend to agree with John Philips in Transgender on Screen writing: 'even well-intentioned popular entertainment [fails] to produce wholly positive representations' (Philips 2006, 15). Thus, the coverage in mainstream media of the lives of trans people tends to be a tabloidization of transsexuality, often focusing on the artificiality of their gender and the inability to fully incarnate manhood or womanhood.

The trans vlogs

The trans vlogs figure as short video clips (usually 2-8 minutes long) and are predominantly produced, populated and distributed by young trans people aged 16-30 years old. The YouTubers often record themselves, using the webcam built into their computer, which gives these videos a specific (low-grade) aesthetic expression. The YouTubers are speaking straight-to-camera and implicitly address an audience of fellow trans, queer or trans-curious people. The trans vlogs can in the words of Patricia Lang, be regarded as 'videos of affiliation' focusing on establishing communicative connections with other like-minded people (Lange

2009, 71). Therefore they do not have to be original or well crafted in order to attract attention as Lang points out but this can still be a determining factor in creating and sustaining an audience (Müller 2009, 129). Taking this into account, it is no surprise that 'Erica' (a 25 years old MtF, USA) attracts more viewers than many of the other YouTubers, as she is one of the first trans vloggers on YouTube and working more persistently and experimentally with the medium than many of the others.

Born online

In the trans vlog, I will argue that the camera plays several important roles, but first and foremost it is a vehicle of transubstantiation[3]. The camera not only documents but also enables the transformation. Like the hormones or the surgical instruments, the camera has the power to turn the YouTubers into the men and women they identify themselves as.

A surprisingly large number of YouTubers start their vlogs around the time of the first shot of hormones. They often inject the hormones online as in a double 'shot' – they pull the trigger on the hypodermic needle and the camera, initiating the process of becoming man/woman. The vlogs become 'screen-births' illustrated in for instance 'Wheeler's' (a 18 years old FtM, USA) row of vlogs, starting with his first shot of testosterone and labelled 'day one'. For most of the transmen the rebirth starts the day they start taking testosterone and they structure and label the vlogs after how many months they have been taking the hormone. The birth-metaphor is also explicated in 'Wheeler's' first video as he says:

> so today is my first day, being born, I guess … I feel really good, I feel like there is just a huge weight that has been lifted from my soul, I guess, and I feel ready to embrace life now as the person I was supposed to be. I guess it is like being born but being able to form full sentences and walk and talk and like do all the fun stuff' (Febuary 03, 2009).

The camera witnesses the 'birth' and 'growing up' of 'Wheeler', but I will argue that it also enables him to become the man that he wants to be. As the row of vlogs progresses 'Wheeler' becomes more and more accustomed to the camera and in front of the camera he learns and relearns culturally located bodily practices that define gender. In the vlogs he is producing or performing a certain (gender) identity and trying it out in front of an audience. Thus, YouTube functions as a mirror in various ways. First of all, when you upload a video and you look at your computer screen with the webcam on, you are looking at your own reflection. You do not have eye contact with yourself but you see an already edited version of yourself as image.

The camera invites the YouTuber to assume the shape of a desired identity/representation. The mirroring effect of the screen is evident, as the YouTuber seems absorbed in his/her own reflection, adjusting his/her hair, clothes or smile while talking. Thus, there is a constant and ongoing evaluation of oneself as an attractive image and trying out different 'styles of the flesh' (Butler 1990, 177). Thereby the camera indeed is an important tool in the transubstantiation. The YouTuber literally talks to themselves, but knowing that other people might be watching on the other side of the mirror/screen. As Giovanna Fossati states: 'YouTube reflects you and you reflect (on) YouTube' (Fossati 2009, 460). This is taken very literally in some vlogs, for instance by 'Simon' (a 21 years old FtM, USA) who asks the viewers to be his "mirror" and tell him what shirt to wear (June 06, 2009). The vlogs can be read as ongoing mirror stages enabling the formation of the ego/I via the identification and internalization of one's own specular image. As Jacques Lacan points out:

> This act [looking into the mirror], far from exhausting itself, as in the case of the monkey, once the image has been mastered and found empty, immediately rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates – the child's own body, and the persons and things, around him. (Lacan 2002, 3)

The mirror/vlog is a medium in which to master one's identity, trying out and incorporating the ideal reflection of the ego. Furthermore, the mirror/vlog can also become an ideal reflection or a role model for others. Thus, the YouTubers are proving to themselves as well as others that transubstantiation is possible. The vlogs offer guidance and direction on 'the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image' (Lacan 2002, 3).

The screen-birth of one YouTuber anticipates the (screen-)births of others, often in very concrete ways. One example is 'Erica's' request for more trans people to blog: 'I issue a challenge – make our own videos […] If I can do it, you can do it' (March 05, 2007). However, it seems as if the request is not just about blogging but also about coming out and claiming a trans identity.

Autobiographies of the digital age

These vlogs can be seen as autobiographies of the digital age, part of the increasing number of publications of transsexual autobiographies (starting in 1933 (Hoyer 1933) and seriously increasing from the nineties). The autobiographical act is a

crucial part of trans people's lives as they are constantly required to elucidate the origin and ongoing sense of gender. In order to access a medical and legal sex reassignment trans people need to be diagnosed with 'Gender Identity Disorder' and 'pass' the following criteria:

> There must be evidence of a strong and persistent cross-gender identification, which is the desire to be, or the insistence that one is, of the other sex (Criterion A). … There must also be evidence of persistent discomfort about one's assigned sex or a sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex (Criterion B)" …To make the diagnosis, there must be evidence of clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning (Criterion D). (DSM IV 1994, 532)

The process of diagnosing a trans person is above all narratological as the diagnosis derives from the person's narrative (Prosser 1998, 104). The potential polyvocalities of lived experience are silenced because the stories that the trans people tell the clinician must mirror or echo the diagnosis, matching the master narrative. As Prosser points out: 'In effect, to be transsexual, the subject must be a skilled narrator of his or her own life. Tell the story persuasively, and you're likely to get your hormones and surgery' (Prosser 1998, 108). This is not just the case in the clinician's office but also on YouTube. Many YouTubers use their vlogs as a way to raise money for their transition, often by listing an account number where you can donate money or by explicitly asking for funding, like for instance 'Larry' (a 32 year old FtM, USA) who urges people to donate money for his long wanted top-surgery (September 22, 2009).

A coherent explanation is often also expected from trans people's family and friends. There seem to be two possible options, either you tell the story of your lifelong suffering in the 'wrong body' (enabling their understanding, but pathologising yourself) or you refrain from telling a story of suffering, explaining it as a choice you have made (keeping your feeling of 'sanity' and agency, but putting their understanding and acceptance at stake). The fact that the first autobiographies often take place in the clinician's office set the standard for highly formalised narratives. This may be the reason why the written autobiographies of trans people tends to be 'structured around shared tropes and fulfilling a particular narrative organization of consecutive stages: suffering and confusion; the epiphany of self-discovery; corporeal and social transformation/conversion; and finally the arrival 'home' – the reassignment' (Prosser 1998, 101). The vlogs seem to a certain extent to fol-

low the linear and conformist master narrative of transsexuality in the written autobiographies – they too become voyages into an authentic self. In a Lacanian sense the vlogs can be seen as a movement from a disidentification with the reflection to a full identification. The YouTuber slowly sees him/herself in the 'mirror' and, yet, in the imaginary the man/woman was there all along. But the vlogs are also dilating the purpose and scope of the literary autobiographies because of the ongoing re-presentation, re-visioning and re-writing of the personal story.

Vlog as a medium gives the YouTuber a multimodal opportunity for documenting, telling and commenting on their story and their gender changes continually – and to get feedback from others. 'Erica's' biography has been written and rewritten several times as she is one of the first and most persistent trans YouTubers. In collaboration with a documentary maker she has made a film about her life story and her life on YouTube, using her earlier vlogs as footage. This film is of course uploaded on YouTube where it becomes part of a meta- reflective vlogging practice. What 'Erica' shares with us in this film is how YouTube increasingly is being used by trans people to represent identities and ask questions that have been censored or denied representation elsewhere. Watching other trans people's stories enabled her own realisation process and the recognition of her own biography as a trans narrative. The vlogs have become visual as well as narrative maps for her self-construction and self-reflection as trans. It has transformed her gender identity from a private fantasy to a public display. Thus, digitalising her life is very much part of a process of becoming 'woman'. As Prosser points out: 'Yet as this corporeal reconstruction is made possible though narrative and, indeed, as the transsexual self must be represented before it is realized in the flesh, transsexuality is equally bound to representation, dependent on its symbolisation to be real' (Prosser 1998, 209). The vlogs become certificates of presence or birth certificates trying to catch and promote the (re-) embodiment of the subject. Not just 'Erica' but the majority of the trans YouTubers use vlogs as a medium for continuous digital lifestory-telling, utilising the vlog format as 'a personal media practice' and a way of 'crafting an agentive self' (Lundby 2008, 3-5). 'Erica's' life on YouTube has enabled her to (re)invent her transsexuality from being something extraordinary (which it often is in mainstream media) to something ordinary and back into the extraordinary because of the massive attention that the vlogs have given her.

Video diaries

As a diary the vlogs serve the function of documenting the YouTubers recent activities, thoughts, problems

as well as enabling the release of emotional tension, which is similar to regular blogging (Nardi, Schiano and Gumbrecht 2004). However, the vlogs predominantly update and map the bodily changes, and therefore the vlogs are often structured around verbal enumeration and visual registration of what the hormones and/or the surgery have facilitated. The camera plays the role of an attesting and attentive other, securing the YouTuber a personal repository. Mapping the ongoing process of materialisation also involves registering the changes that the voice goes through and therefore a lot of vlogs contain singing.

'Jan' (a 26 years old FtM, USA) has explicitly labelled his vlogs as 'transman diaries' highlighting their function as present-status update. He has several vlogs with himself singing in front of the webcam in his room. In one of the clips he is singing 'Come What May' (2001), the song popularized by Ewan McGregor and Nicole Kidman from the movie *Moulin Rouge*, after 6 months on testosterone. The vlog incorporates a private *mise en scène*, which is common for trans vlogs, thus we are in 'Jan's' room with a half naked 'Jan' singing. The lyric of the song seems to symbolise 'Jan's' transition and his feelings towards it ('suddenly my life doesn't seem such a waste'). He cannot foresee what he will become but surely there will be changes and challenges. Anticipating those changes and challenges, it seems like he is comforting himself: 'Come what may, I will love you until my dying day'. The setting and the use of the camera establish a feeling of an intimate encounter. He looks directly into the camera with a playful and flirtatious look while singing. He draws the viewer into the song, makes us believe that this song is for us as he instructs us when the female and male part is coming up – and wonders with us if he will be able to sing the female part. As he says: 'This shall be funny' while he smiles at us (September 26, 2008). The vlog produces evidence of 'Jan's' live body and provide a spontaneous, present-status update with the use of deictic gestures. Half way through the song he reaches out for the computer in order to turn up the volume and his arm is heading directly towards my field of vision. I hear the well-known sound of a mac computer adjusting its volume, 'Come what may' a little higher and 'Jan' laughing as he cracks while trying to sing the female part. 'I hope you enjoyed it' he says in the end whereby he transits feelings of connection. Like a diary the style is intimate, outspoken and yet these vlogs are very communicative, directing attention towards a potential sympathetic viewer.

'Simon' also uses his vlogs as diaries, sharing intimate details about his therapy sessions, relationships and fears. In one of his vlogs he touches upon the confessional mode that he himself and oth-

ers use. He talks about being very sensitive, emotional, shy and afraid of rejections, but still he exposes himself in front of a global audience. He explains it this way: 'I'm really shy, and these videos are easy because right now all I do is talking to a camera, talking with self, which I do in my head anyway, talk to myself". Later he states: 'I hold back more in real life than on the computer' (October 07, 2007). 'Simon' pinpoints the camera as a kind interlocutor, someone you can trust and tell everything. The camera is the eye that sees and the ear that listens powerfully but without judgement and reprisal. Thus, YouTube becomes 'an archive of affective moments or formations' (Grusin 2009, 66), a platform for 'emotional resonance' creating space for solidarity and authenticity, self-esteem and self-efficacy, fear and anger like live trans support groups (Schrock, Holden and Reid 2004). However, the vlogs also in some respects restage the confessions that transsexuals are bound to go through in order to access hormones and/or surgery. The question is how and why this continuous confession can be liberating? Is it used as a re-appropriating strategy, part of a continuous self-naming and retelling one's story at one's own request? Read with Michel Foucault in mind confessions are not inherently liberating, but we have been pushed to see them that way by the powers that extract confessions from us. Confessions make us subjects in both senses of the word – we are subjected to powers (doctors, government officials, judges, teachers, parents, etc.) that draw confessions from us, and through confession we come to see ourselves as thinking subjects, the subject of confession (Foucault 1998). The concept of 'empowering exhibitionism' (Koskela 2004) seems applicable and well suited to capture the paradox of self-disclosure at stake in these vlogs.

YouTube is my hood. Creating an online community

Besides serving as an autobiography and a diary, the vlogs also engender (trans)national communities by the conversational character of engagement. The YouTuber persistently hails potentially interested parties with a 'Hi guys' and invites feedback and discussion, either as text comments below the video or as video responses. Thereby the camera is a vehicle of communication and social connection used to merit attention in a way that resembles face-to-face interaction. The titles of the vlogs ('Just to update you guys' ect.) also sometimes frame them as oriented towards human connections.

For the transgendered YouTubers social networking is highly important, as they recount experiences of transphobia and numerous problems with getting medical and economic support for the transition.

They also express feeling alienated around their family who have difficulties relating to them in their (new) gender identity. YouTube becomes an online community, connecting individuals across geographic divides thereby challenging spatial borders and opening up for the construction of transnational communities. In this vein, 'Jonathan' (a 35 years old FtM, Canada) has facilitated a mapping project in order to make visible and connect the huge amount of transmen across the world. He did this because he lives in 'a pretty small community' where he rarely meets other trans men. And as he says: 'I got inspired to do this because I think that anyone who goes through transition at some point has one of those days where you feel kind of alone through the whole thing' (February 22, 2009).

The trans people seem to use YouTube as a way to create new social relations which distinguishes the use from the way that SNS (Social Network Sites) is predominantly used, namely as a way to maintain pre-established relations (Boyd & Ellison 2008). Many of the YouTubers express both a strong connection and an obligation to the YouTube community. Sharing knowledge about how they feel about being trans, how to make a packer[4], how to inject hormones, what kind of surgery to get etc. becomes a communal commitment and way to offer support. As 'Larry' (a 32 years old FtM, USA) says 'I appreciate this community…If it wasn't for you I don't know what I would do' (September 11, 2009). YouTube is articulated as a forum removed from the YouTubers immediate physical locality and constructed as an alternative and somewhat utopian 'place', a space of fantasy communion that satisfies the desire to belong. YouTube is to some extent perceived as a 'parochial space' (O'Riordan and Bassett 2002, 9) engendered by the attention and support the transgendered YouTubers get. The support can be in the shape of concrete economic funds for the transition and places to stay when abroad or as emotional recognition and encouragement.

'Trans'-formations

For a viewer just brushing through the trans vlogs, the continuous self-reporting may seem overwhelmingly self-absorbed. However, my argument is that these vlogs have a transformative potential. First of all, they seem to engender the ongoing process of materialisation, of becoming man/woman. The YouTubers are born online as media-bodies, using the vlogs as a performative tool assisting in the dismantling of certain gendered signifiers and the creation of others, which on the one hand ensures the YouTuber with a *new* body image and yet on the other hand bond him/her to the former image. This bodily becoming tends to be visualized and narrated as an empowering re-

invention and re-birth.

Secondly, the vlogs bear out the feminist slogan that the personal is political by their personalised unravelling and negotiating of the meaning of trans identity. Computer technology seems to be a powerful tool that gives LGBT people access to political visibility and a possibility to challenge their under-or misrepresentation in traditional print and broadcast media (Alexander 2002a). The vlogs can help to mobilise and disseminate information about transition and trans identity (O'Riordan 2005) and therefore the vlogs can be read as online global activism, assisting in challenging the image of transsexuals as passive and pathologised subjects[5]. Lastly, vlogging enables new transnational networks besides maintaining already established communities. However, commerce and community goes hand in hand as many YouTubers use the vlogs as a way to raise economic funds for their transition.

Visibility plays a key role in these transformations and becomes a prerequisite for the transgendered YouTuber's (new) identity, engendering them with a voice, an image and a community. The visual media is highly important as it promises (like transition itself) to make visible the identity that often begins as imperceptible (Prosser 1998, 211). Previously, many trans people were reluctant to be visible as 'trans' because they feared stigmatization and wished to 'pass'[6] (Green 2006), but that seems to be changing with these vlogs. However, visibility still seems to be somewhat of a paradox for trans people enabling them to be part of a community and be out and proud about their transness but potentially complicating their assimilation as men/women.

Endnotes:

[1] The YouTuber is a category that operates in the community itself as well as in academic discourse, see Burgess and Green 2009a and Lange 2007.

[2] See for instance AoIR 2002; O'Riordan & Bassett 2002; White 2002; Bromseth 2003; Buchanan 2004; Ess 2009; Svenningson Elm 2009.

[3] I am using "transubstantiation" with its references to the Roman Catholic term used to describe what happens to the bread and wine during the celebration of Holy Communion. Transubstantiation means that the bread and wine have been supernaturally changed into the body and blood of Christ. The miracle of the Incarnation is repeated as Jesus Christ once again takes on human form for our benefit. However, I am also inspired by Judith Butler's use of "transubstantiation" in her reading of "Paris Is Burning" by Jennie Livingston. Here Butler specifically connects transubstantiation to transsexuality as she points out that some of the characters in the film "are engaged in life projects to effect a full transubstantiation into femininity and/or whiteness" ("Bodies that Matter", 134). Thus, Butler is also connecting transubstantiation to the effect of the camera – e.g. "the camera acts as surgical instrument and operation, the vehicle through which the transubstantiation occurs. Livinston thus becomes the one with the power to turn men into women who, then, depend on the power of her

gaze to become and remain women" ("Bodies that Matter", 135). I am also inspired by Jay Prosser's use of "transubstantiation" as a way to capture the complex process whereby embodiment and re-embodiment play a key role in the narratives of transsexuals

[4] A packer is an item used by transmen in the front of his pants or underwear to give the appearance of and install a feeling of having a penis. A huge amount of trans vlogs share information about how to make your own packer out of different kinds of cheap material and where to buy a good and cheap pre-manufactured life-like packer.

[5] As is often the case within medical discourse as well as in research like for instance Raymond 1994 and Hausman 1995

[6] To pass is a crucial issue for many trans people, connected to a feeling of being recognised as the gender they feel they belong to. As Sander Gilman points out, ''Passing' is not becoming 'invisible' but becoming differently visible – being seen as a member of a group with which one wants or needs to identify' (Gilman 1999, xxi). Passing is the 'ability to become (in)visible, seen but not seen' (op.cit., 42). Invisibility involves being part of a norm instead of being considered deviant; being unmarked contrary to being marked. Passing is therefore about inclusion and exclusion, suggesting that identity involves performance and recognition of certain kinds of signifiers. Passing can be a wish, a possibility and also an imperative for certain people, for instance trans people. For trans people passing aligns inner gender identity with social identity, thus assimilating as a man/woman often necessitates a concealment of your transgendered history (e.g. Prosser 1998, 184-187).

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To be on Song

Laurie J. Shrage, ed. 2009. *'You've Changed': Sex Reassignment and Personal Identity.* New York: Oxford University Press. 220 pp.

ISBN 978-0-19-538571-7; 978-0-19-538570-0.

Keywords: transsexuality, change, self, other, difference, gender

'You've Changed': Sex Reassignment and Personal Identity is a collected volume, edited by the feminist philosopher Laurie J. Shrage, whose previous work concerns reproductive and sexual rights. The book's eleven chapters centre on themes as diverse as bodily agency and authenticity; the legal, ethical and social aspects of intelligibility; plastic surgery and race change; and the sex/gender distinction. These topics are discussed in terms of their relevance for transembodied and non-transembodied subjects, underlining the book's stated objective to facilitate bridge-building between trans and nontrans feminists. As Shrage puts it in the Introduction, the essays in this collection on transsexuality raise issues 'about the sex or gender identities of those who see themselves as normally sexed and gendered' (9).

The argument throughout '*You've Changed*' is that transsexuality cannot be located in an identity or a singular difference. The terminology of the book also reflects the impossibility of final location. While the authors sometimes use 'transsexuality' to refer to people who seek sex reassignment, and 'transgender' to denote those without medical treatment, these terms are also used interchangeably. This is the usage I will be following here, giving semantic privilege to the prefix 'trans' that, in the transtheorist Bobby Noble's words, has the capacity 'to signify subjectivities where bodies are at odds with gender presentation, regardless of whether that mis-alignment is self-evident in conventional ways or not' (Noble cited in Overall 2009, 11). The pronoun 'we' will also be used frequently in the review. It is intended to refer to those located at the intersections between transtheory and feminism and is not meant

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to erase differences between individuals.

What links the different chapters in the volume together is the understanding that the scope of personal change – including, but not limited to, gender transition - exceeds the self. Chapters 1-4 question the possibility of imagining gender as well as transgender as bounded categories that produce equally bounded selves. The first chapter, written by Christine Overall on 'Sex/Gender Transitions and Life-Changing Aspirations' questions the 'gender within' argument that assumes that 'the [post-transition] real person is a reified self that constitutes the core of the individual and that does not change during the transition' (18). Overall argues that gender is not innate, given or uncomplicated, and it does not cease to be problematic once the transition is over. In 'Transsexuality and Contextual Identities' (Ch. 2), Georgia Warnke goes further by proposing a 'disestablishing' of gender. As Warnke writes, 'when we think we are describing gender, we may well be describing something else instead, not only race or class but nationality, age and a host of different attributes' (32). Instead of using gender as the basis of categorizing people, Warnke suggests that we see identities as interpretations whose gender is relevant in some contexts, but not in others. For instance, trans/gender should not be seen as an essential marker of identity that has any bearing on the meaning of marriage. The imperative to disestablish identity categories, such as the ontologically stable category of 'the transsexual', is also put forward in Jacob C. Hale's chapter, entitled 'Tracing a Ghostly Memory in My Throat: Reflections on Ftm Feminist Voice and Agency' (Ch. 3). For Hale, the worldliness or embodied complexity of translives is not reflected in extant identity categories that require 'denying, erasing, or otherwise abjecting personally significant aspects of ourselves' (55). Therefore, Hale proposes that we seek to inhabit categorial borderlands rather than categories themselves. Category slippages carry the promise of freedom also for Naomi Zack. In her obituary-essay entitled 'Transsexuality and Daseia Y. Cavers-Huff' (Ch. 4), Zack claims that gender is a choice for trans and nontrans people alike. Transpeople do not transgress gender so much as they transgress prevalent ideas about freedom; about what can be. That is why transsexuality appears to be a problem for normatively gendered interpretive others: because it stands for too much freedom. This transgression is also seen as automatically relating to other multiple positionings. As Zack writes provocatively: 'I speculate that editors assume I am qualified to write about transsexuality by virtue of being multiracial' (74).

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 focus on the role of perception in shaping trans/bodies and trans/lives. Gayle

Salamon reads the French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty's 'fantastically ambiguous' (85) account of sexuality in 'The Sexual Schema: Transposition and Transgender in *Phenomenology of Perception*' (Ch. 5). Merleau-Ponty argues that the body exists in how the 'I' experiences it, but one's perception alone is not sufficient to make one's body. Instead, the body is forged through one's relationships with, and desire for, others. For Salamon this means that no ontological truth can be inferred from the contours of one's body: the 'truth' of the body's sex exists in the 'relation between the material and the ideal, the perceiver and the perceived, between the materiality of any one body and the network of forces and contexts that shape the material and the meaning of that body' (93). However, as Talia Mae Bettcher points out in 'Trans-Identities and First-Person Authority' (Ch. 6), we can only understand sex this way if the other and the self exist in an ethical relationship. Ethics here means recognizing others' authority over their self-perceptions, something which transpeople have historically been denied. In 'Queer Breasted Experience' (Ch. 7), Kim Q. Hall writes that instead of understanding sex and disability as bodily facts, we should see them as attributions. Calling for a disalignment of sex and body parts, Hall suggests that the experiences of, for instance, women with mastectomy scars and female-bodied men are intelligible only in terms of 'a phenomenology of sex in which biology offers no unifying ground' (129).

Cressida J. Heyes and Diana Tietjens Meyers' texts are concerned with the feminist critique that sees sex reassignment as unnecessary body modification and relates it to plastic surgery, a pertinent and undertheorized example of elective body manipulation. Heyes's focus is the assumed analogy between transsexuality and transracialism, or the modification of one's racial features by surgery. As she writes in 'Changing Race, Changing Sex: The Ethics of Self-Transformation' (Ch. 8), the analogical model of thinking is misleading because it treats 'gender, race, sexuality, and other identity categories as identical building blocks by assuming their equivalence' (138). Heyes argues that different differences are mutually constitutive: one cannot be understood through the analytic rubric of the other. In 'Artifice and Authenticity: Gender Technology and Agency in Two Jenny Saville Portraits' (Ch. 9), Meyers contests the Cartesian underpinnings of the feminist discourse on plastic surgery and sex change. Similarly to Heyes, Meyers also relies on a model of mutual constitution, only she emphasizes the radical correlation between body and mind. Meyers claims agency for bodies that are produced by surgery by arguing for a 'psychocorporeality of selfhood' (156) whereby the self is seen as residing in the body, not

only or specifically in the mind.

As Shrage and Graham Mayeda show, dominant scientific and legal discourses would have us disbelieve this notion that agency resides in the body. Shrage's chapter, 'Sex and Miscibility' (Ch. 10) discusses female and male hormones that are taken to be determining for the development of sexed embodiment. Shrage states that these so-called 'sex hormones' can be found in both females and males. This implies that sex only masquerades as a given; in fact, bodies and body parts 'become female and male by virtue of their respective female and male chemicals and chemicals take on female and male properties by virtue of their presence in bodies we read as female and male' (181-82). Mayeda in 'Who Do You Think You Are? When Should the Law Let You Be Who You Wanna Be?' (Ch. 11) writes about how the law relies on the stability offered by the scientific categorization of bodies on the basis of their sex. As he says, 'Challenging the binary of male/female surprises, and the law, like society, does not like surprises' (197). In Mayeda's view, there needs to be an ethical relationship between the law and its subjects. This is possible only if the law takes into account one's self-identification: 'if we recognize another's self-identified gender identity, we have the possibility of freeing them from restrictive social norms, and thereby we take responsibility for both the subjectivity of the other and the way in which these norms exclude her' (203).

'*You've Changed*' got its title from a popular jazz number. The song 'You've Changed' is about heartbreak and losing the other. As Billie Holiday sings it, 'You've changed/ You're not the angel I once knew/ No need to tell me that we're through/ It's all over now/ You've changed'. "*You've Changed*", the book reverses this narrative order. It recognizes that the words 'you've changed' also create a scene of address. Calling somebody 'you' – as opposed to, say, 'the transsexual', or 'the nontrans feminist' - does not so much ask the possibility of a shared reality as it marks the recognition of the presence and urgency of such a world. The volume is the first co-authored book in philosophy that is, to borrow Bettcher and Garry's phrase, both 'feminist and trans-centered' (Bettcher and Garry 2009, 1). It provides a well-guided tour to various theories. What it does *not* do is play the same old song.

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Scott Turner Schofield, 2008. *Two Truths and a Lie*. Homofactus Press, 128 pp.

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Keywords: transgender, gender, feminism, queer theory, memoir, performance art

Having attended several trans cultural performances,[1] I was particularly struck by the depth, awareness, artistry and timeliness of Scott Turner Schofield's 'Underground Transit' show at my university last year. Schofield, according to his website, is a 'man who was a woman, a lesbian turned straight guy who is usually taken for a gay teenager' (www.undergroundtransit.com). He is an author and performance artist from the Deep South, USA who critiques culture through autobiography, advocating for social and political change through his award winning[2] solo work. Schofield stands out among trans performance artists in that he successfully enlightens as well as truly entertains. I hoped to find Schofield's written memoir as refreshing, entertaining and educational as his performance.

The highly acclaimed[3] *Two Truths and a Lie* tells the author's personal tales of gender transgression and transition through three performance scripts with a monologue conclusion and a foreword by feminist scholar and queer theorist Judith (Jack) Halberstam. This is the author's first book, having previously contributed to edited collections.[4] *Two Truths and a Lie* provides a genuine alternative to mainstream trans memoir narratives, not only for its unique format but also for the educational information provided, the breadth of experiences detailed and the particularly young age at which the author's transition narrative takes place.

Schofield acknowledges that he is not the first to find performance a useful medium for communicating the complexities of gender, sexuality and trans embodiment. He cites pioneers of modern trans/gender

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education,[5] as well as feminist and queer theoretical conceptions of gender as performance,[6] that have paved the way for, and directly influenced, his work. He has taken the concept, established by Kate Bornstein in her 1994 book *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us,* of interspersing performance scripts with trans/gender[7] theory one step further, this time making the theory more explicit within the performance, removing the necessity for commentary and explanations that Bornstein's groundbreaking work required fourteen years previously. Judith Butler's ideas of gender performativity (1990) is taken literally by Schofield, as he exposes the theatrical nature of gender not only for trans people, but for homecoming queens, debutantes and everyone else.

Moving away from the trans memoir tradition of 'suffering' and 'trapped in the wrong body' tales,[8] Schofield candidly and creatively breaks the mould for transgender narratives. He avoids making universalising generalisations about 'the trans experience, instead expressing, 'I wanted to tell a story I was not hearing about the transgender experience I found myself living' (103). While not to discount the suffering and 'wrong body' moments many trans people, including perhaps Schofield, indeed experience, refreshingly the word 'suffer' does not appear once, the book embraces rather than shies away from queerness, and the author makes a point to assert, 'I was not born in the wrong body' (70). Although transphobic injustice persists, times are definitely changing. Many of Schofield's memoir-writing predecessors 'came out' later in life and had few trans role models. Like some of his young trans peers, Schofield 'came out' and began transitioning during his early twenties. Schofield literally pioneers the new generation of trans memoirs with anecdotes from his near election as homecoming queen, his mother's attempts to be supportive while fearing he was on drugs, and his attendance at three debutante balls – a queer coming of age story for the 21st Century.

The three plays are introduced and interspersed with dedications, histories of performances and – in keeping with trans memoir tradition – photographs. The book begins with 'Underground Transit', a poetic literary beauty which is as delightful on the page as in live performance. Set as a New York City subway journey, this piece is a wild ride through multiple genders in one life. Stories conveyed through anecdotes and flashbacks animate fears and emotions, experiences of discrimination and misogyny, as well as comedic quips from Schofield's real life gender journey. Alliteration, imagery and metaphor convey stories that, as the author notes, simply could not have been made up. This starting piece introduces readers to a variety of identities and an unexpected theme

of the book – embracing one's queerness. Schofield reveals having 'come out' as feminist, lesbian, trans and nearly as debutante, but does not make apologies for any of them. He thinks, 'it's some kind of defensive convention. We're taught never ever to mention anything a little queer' (11).

In 'Debutante Balls', we are whisked away to the Deep South, complete with glasses of sweet tea. This second play is a meditation on 'coming out', as well as sexuality, ethnicity, class and gender all through the comedic adventures of coming of age, debutante style. The author compares 'coming out' queer to 'coming out' debutante, and educates us on gender performativity with the refrain, 'You gotta know how to make an entrance, how to be gracious and take it in stride, if you want to survive' (36). The piece's wildly entertaining theoretical musings are as accessible as they come. He also problematises 'normal', and includes everyone by speculating, 'But what if normal people would come out, too? There'd be a place for nose pickers to go, a support group for the chronically tardy…' (54). While similarly rhythmic and lyrical, story lines in this slower piece intrigue and then digress, interspersed with music, dancing and blaring sirens which are easily envisaged by the reader.

In the final performance piece, a collection of short vignettes comprise 'Becoming a Man in 127 EASY Steps'. Complex stage settings backdrop this 'choose your own adventure' collection of snippets from Schofield's life which fill in the gaps of the first two pieces with powerful moments of his gendered journey. Armed only with his experience, he tackles contentious issues and educates on various viewpoints and realities. Private moments are revealed through voicemail recordings, letters, stories and intimate encounters; some hilarious, others raw with reality. Blunt and unapologetic, Schofield securely positions himself as a comedian while sombrely conveying poignant moments of difficulty. He makes a point to disclaim:

> 'I haven't told you everything at all. I haven't told you about how I became deeply depressed at age eleven… tried to kill myself twice in high school and once since then… Of course it isn't easy' (95).

Schofield's writing reflects his acting and linguistic skills in providing clear mental images, tear jerking moments and belly laughs.

In Schofield's monologue conclusion, 'Are we There Yet?', he expresses his motivation to put his story, and through it complex concepts like sex, gender and sexuality, out there in a way which would educate his own 'middle-American family', as well as everyone else (105). He affirms the book as an extensive collection of his truths,

complemented with a couple of little white lies (but I am not spoiling it!). Did Schofield accomplish what he set out to? I think so. He self-reflexively details how 'post-transition' live performances have opened him up to being misunderstood (including being read as a pre-transition trans woman). I doubt these misunderstandings are limited to the live performances, though. Not unlike the shortcomings he experiences in live performances, some allusions and nuances of his written work will be lost on more general readers and, a typical conundrum of queer work, his resistance to static identity categories can unavoidably result in confusion for those new to concepts of gender and sexual fluidity. Written descriptions of complex stage settings, intimate revelations, dance sequences and musical performances also lack something that I imagine only the live performances adequately convey.

Potential confusion barely detracts from all that the work does accomplish, however, and Schofield's book has indisputably done something to open the minds of the 'perfect audiences' he seeks, 'visible queers alongside sorority girls, jocks, worried administrators, and eager professors' (110). The three performance pieces work well as a book, coming to life through vivid descriptions. The experience feels like a roller-coaster ride, and once picked up, the book is impossible to put down. Having seen one of the plays live, and now having read the entire collection, I wonder if maybe the written version is preferable for just one, important reason. As a reader, one can relish the work's true poetic beauty and structure, savouring the author's artful use of metaphor and rhythm, while Schofield's live act simply whizzes by.

Endnotes:

[1] Including trans performances at: Transfabulous, London 2008; Transgender Film Festival, Amsterdam, 2009; ILGA Europe Trans Rights Pre-Conference, Malta, 2009; Transgender Studies and Theories Conference, Linköping, 2009.

[2] According to his website, Schofield has received several awards, including: 'Fruitie' for Off-Broadway Performance; 2007 Princess Grace Foundation Fellowship in Acting; and Creation Fund Commission from the National Performance Network for 'Becoming a Man in 127 EASY Steps' (Schofield 2010).

[3] Schofield's book was listed as a finalist for two Lambda Literary Awards in 2008, and was included on the American Library Association's Rainbow List in 2009 (Schofield 2010).

[4] *Becoming: Young Ideas on Gender, Identity and Sexuality* (Anderson-Minshall and de Vries 2004) and *Self Organising Men* (Sennett 2006).

[5] Such as Kate Bornstein, Judith (Jack) Halberstam, and S. Bear Bergman.

[6] See also Butler, Judith (1990).

[7] Trans/gender is written in this way to acknowledge that trans theory and gender theory are not disconnected and separate

disciplines or ideas. The term 'trans/gender' is intended to encompass ideas incorporated by both 'trans' and 'gender' theories.

[8] A long established tradition that continues today. See: Morris, 1974; Martino, 1977; Hoyman 1999; Ames, 2005; Cromwell, 2010.

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Sally Hines and Tam Sanger, eds. 2007. *Transgender Identities: Towards a Social Analysis of Gender.* London and New York: Routledge, 298 pp.

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Keywords: trans, transgender, queer, transgender studies, identity, sociology

In her introduction Sally Hines cites Whittle's (2006) call for a reinstatement of materiality in analyses of transgender. The need to connect more directly with the experienced lives of trans people is a preoccupation in several chapters, as authors observe shifts in trans identities (both individual and within communities) and an increasing resistance by trans people to being defined by others.

'Emerging Identities' (and constraints upon them) is a preoccupation of the book and one of four organizing themes, along with 'Trans Governance', 'Transforming Identities' and 'Transforming Theory'. Although the book will be of interest to those working in gender studies, transgender studies and related fields – Hines sketches thoughts towards a sociology of transgender – there is a wealth of material of interest to the trans community and other minority communities.

Hines lectures in Sociology and Gender Studies at the University of Leeds. She has written extensively and influentially on trans, identity, sexuality and gender and is researching the impact of the UK Gender Recognition Act, as discussed in her own chapter. Co-editor Tam Sanger is a teaching fellow at Queen's University Belfast with an interest in trans, asexuality, polyamory and society's regulation of gender and sexual 'difference'. Other authors come from a variety of backgrounds. As well as (primarily UK and USA) academics there are contributions from a psychotherapist and a research scientist. The book contains thirteen chapters clustered around the four organising themes.

There is significant focus on UK experience, where much has changed in recent years. Several

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authors explore the limitations of established theoretical frameworks and the power of language to liberate or to constrain, signposting some important developments. Paradoxically though there are some examples of poor or outdated language, and some issues seem poorly understood and/or described in ways which could be construed as judgmental. Terms such as 'passing', which are seen as increasingly problematic by trans people themselves, are used without the benefit of critical scrutiny. Zowie Davy ('Transsexual Agents') argues that trans people 'foster relationships with medicine in order to negotiate *aesthetic* interventions' (106, my italics). Later in that chapter a trans woman is quoted describing facial feminization surgery (FFS) as 'cosmetic', a view Davy leaves unchallenged. While FFS is not uncontroversial within the trans community, surgeries aimed at allowing people to function better as individuals within society (including genital surgeries) are perhaps not best described primarily as 'aesthetic'.

For the most part these problems arise in otherwise useful chapters, with the exception of Richard Ekins and Dave King's 'The Emergence of New Transgendering Identities in the Age of the Internet', as discussed later. This may be indicative of a struggle to keep up with the pace of change. Recent signs of a trans and intersex political emergence, resembling those within the gay and lesbian communities in the sixties and seventies, are not adequately explored in the text. As is pointed out on several occasions, terminology in this area is also shifting and contested. In reviewing the book I am sensitive to terminology, but for reasons of simplicity I restrict myself to the umbrella term trans.

A key and recurring theme is the tension between trans people's understanding of themselves and others' understanding of them. Laurel Westbrook raises this in her analysis of mainstream and alternative press conceptions of trans ('Becoming Knowably Gendered'), arguing that the explosion of writing from the community between 1990 and 2005 may have 'reinforced the idea of gender (as) both real and desirable' (49). In my view a more sophisticated picture may now be emerging. The explosion of new ways of understanding gender, and being gendered, has led some who consider gender fluid and contingent to challenge trans people who identify towards one end of the spectrum, depicting them as less 'liberated' or 'medically defined'. This perspective is linked to the use of terms such as 'passing' and 'stealth', which are increasingly (and rightly) contested within the community. Em Rundall and Vincent Vecchietti's chapter on workplace experiences ('InVisibility in the Workplace') includes a quote from a trans woman who talks about 'going in' after transition rather than coming out, emphasizing the pres-

sure to blend in and disappear.

I would argue that comparing trans people with a defined sense of gender to those whose self-perception is more fluid, on dubious grounds of 'modernity' or 'authenticity', is a false dichotomy grounded in external perceptions and treatment of trans people. This is partly the fault of the medical establishment, which holds onto particular definitions to provide (or withhold/ration) particular treatments. But gender studies' adherence, at least until recently, to gender as entirely culturally created has maintained unhelpful distinctions between people whose identities may be very different (but more overlapping than has previously been thought), but who have in common, at minimum, Western society's desire to place them in an abject state. Laurel Westbrook, in the conclusion of her chapter, reflects on the (possibly unhelpful) influence of Judith Butler here.

Currently some identities lead to the benefits of full citizenship and necessary medical treatment more readily than others. In her own chapter 'Recognizing Diversity?', Hines argues persuasively that the UK's Gender Recognition Act (2004) 'embodies on-going tensions between very different ways of understanding (trans) gender' (87). The focus of this legislation is those who clearly wish to transition socially from one gender to the other on a permanent basis. Those for whom change is less permanent, or who oscillate, or have a more fluid self-definition are not supported, a situation possibly improved (minutely) under the recent single Equality Act. To problematize things further, I would argue that some trans identities which seem fixed have in fact been formed under repressive cultural and medical circumstances. There are numerous instances of individuals who identify as crossdressers for example, only to then transition later in life and develop different, and more nuanced understandings of gender.

Transition later in life, rather than earlier, may be a result in part of this repression. This idea is given weight by Alison Rooke's chapter 'Telling Trans Stories', which profiles part of the Wellcome Trusts's Sci:dentity project, an artistic endeavour involving 'academics, arts practitioners, medical professionals and ... young (trans) people' (65). Rooke writes powerfully of identities formed relationally as the young people interacted with each other, leading to new understandings and self-understandings. In some cases participants knew no other trans people before the project, and it is perhaps understandable that this kind of interaction can more readily generate possibilities and exploratory thinking by comparison with the more typical experiences of trans youth, often characterized by feelings of fear, isolation and stigmatization.

The inter-relation between trans and other spaces - the dominant heterosexual culture, conceptions of

gender flowing from gender studies and queer studies, the relationship to gay and lesbian communities and the particular strand of feminism that has denied trans women legitimacy as women, as exemplified by Raymond (1980), Bindel (2004) and others - is another recurring theme of the book. Angie Fee, in her chapter 'Who Put the 'Hetero' in Sexuality?', criticizes much gender scholarship for underplaying 'the dominance of the heterosexual matrix ... as the source of sex and gender categorization' (207). She points to ways in which feminist psychoanalysts are challenging this dominant paradigm which considers that only a single gender identity is healthy, and argues for 'multiple meanings, shifting identifications and (accommodating) contradictions which cannot be understood within the gendered, binary language of psychotherapy (while resisting) the temptation of assuming a gender-free space' (217).

There are (sometimes enabling) perspectives from a diverse range of communities. Eve Shapiro contributes a fascinating chapter 'The Impact of Race on Gender Transformation in a Drag Troupe', beginning with a shocking description of a blackface drag king performance before unearthing hidden, though clearly unintentional racist practice in a radical performance troupe. Corie J Hammer ('Corporeal Silences and Bodies that Speak') writes about attempts at two Canadian bathhouses to become more inclusive which paradoxically resulted in some trans men feeling excluded, perhaps because they were regarded through the lens of more traditional understandings of what constitutes masculinity. Sara Davidmann ('Beyond Borders') touches on how the diversity of gender expression increasingly resists heteronormative definitions, and perspectives are widened still further by Katherine Gregory's chapter 'Transgendering in an Urban Dutch Streetwalking Zone'.

These are telling examples of how an approach intended to be liberational can unintentionally reinforce the dominant culture. There are occasions when this occurs within the book itself. Alison Rooke's otherwise excellent chapter misses an opportunity to problematize 'passing', for example. Some authors appear ambivalent about surgical elements of transition, suggesting that the lived experience of trans people is slightly 'out of reach' of the book. By contrast some thinking and writing on the nature of gender by trans individuals, often in non-academic contexts, goes beyond the current level of sophistication of thinking within transgender studies itself. Sass Rogando Sasot's 'On the men who fancy us' (2010) is one such recent example. I was also surprised to find no mention of the work of Julia Serano (2007), one of the most influential trans thinkers of recent years. The most disappointing chapter is the first, by Ekins and

King. Diligent explorers and recorders of emerging gender identities over the years, they contribute a curiously old-fashioned piece which seems intended to provoke, with its talk of 'dominant transgender narratives' (26) which seek 'to expunge sexuality (eroticism)' (31). Their argument lacks currency and seeks to impose authoritative views from above. It feels similar in tone, in that regard, to the strand of feminist argument against the authenticity of trans women. By beginning with this chapter, the editors create an unsettling and uncomfortable tone. Happily this is quickly expunged by the range of views and useful insights to be found in the pages which follow.

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'Forthcoming' Research in Trans Studies: On Assuming Trans- and Inter-Disciplinary Research Methods

Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and the Rhetorics of Materiality.* Columbia University Press: New York, 2010; 226 pp.

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Key Words: embodiment, materiality, transgender studies, queer theory, psychoanalysis, phenomenology.

Assuming a Body: Transgender and the Rhetorics of Materiality by Gayle Salamon is a fine example of scholarship that accomplishes trans- and inter-disciplinary engagement in its interrogation of the 'body-concept'. The four sections of the book focus on different dialogues in which the body as a concept relates to transgenderism. In seven wide-ranging chapters, it demonstrates the theoretical import of transgender embodiment for canonical philosophical texts as well as for feminism and queer theory. Its valuable *interdisciplinary* contribution to transgender studies is to identify tools in phenomenology and psychoanalysis that assist in our understanding of desire and gender, particularly when non-normatively expressed; in this sense it demonstrates conceptual alliance with other fields. *Assuming a Body* also demonstrates ways in which transgender issues are transdisciplinary and 'trans-sect' the academy, cutting through and interrupting ideas that are hostile to or even foreclose transgender subjectivity. Hence, the groundbreaking contributions offered in the lineage of Judith Butler's 'thinking through transgender' practice are sure to be assigned in

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different kinds of courses. Readers have access to new material by Salamon in addition to chapters previously published in journals such as *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* and *GLQ*: *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* as well as in the edited collections, *You've Changed: Sex Change and Personal Identity* (2009) and *Women's Studies on the Edge* (2008).

The title 'assuming a body' refers to a two-fold investigation of the question 'what does it mean to be embodied?' On the one hand, it asks what does it mean for a trans subject versus a normatively gendered subject to 'assume' a body, to take up an embodiment. On the other hand, the question is directed towards bodies of knowledge that conceptualize in different fashions what it means to assume a body or bodies as such, specifically interrogating phenomenology, psychoanalysis, queer theory, sexual difference feminism, judicial discourse and trans scholarship. Salamon's task was to consider how each of these disciplines conceives of the body and the ways in which they may converge to question the assumptions of each other. She takes stock of who assumes what, and for what purpose; in other words, what role 'the body' as well as 'this body' figured as transgender plays in the rhetoric of said discipline. Her stakes in the investigation involve a reckoning of her training in canonical philosophy and her allegiance to the project of trans studies. As a philosopher, she highlights an element of epistemological uncertainty as to what a body is, or can become, mediated by the material and phantasmatic. Equally, she challenges transgender studies to examine its reliance on materiality as an assumption of 'the real,' which she writes is 'a phrase that, it seems to me, can never quite shed its normativizing and disciplinary dimensions' (3). In addition, the book debates salient issues from the field's formative decade: a muted discussion of sexuality, popular representation in the press, autobiography and a vexed relation to women's studies.

Assuming a Body begins by exploring theoretical resonances with transgender studies' concern with the body's 'felt sense'. Through interdisciplinary encounters with psychoanalysis (e.g. Freud, Butler, Prosser) and phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty), Part One re-loads theories of embodiment with a transgender nuance, respectively the 'bodily ego' and a proprioceptive 'sexual schema'. Chapter One concludes that 'bodily assumption, and hence subject formation itself, is a complex oscillation between narcissistic investment in one's own flesh and the "necessary self-division and self-estrangement" … that is the very means by which our bodies are articulated' (41). The relationality to oneself developed through psychoanalysis leads to developing a phenomenological relation to others.

Chapter Two on Merleau-Ponty's concept of a sexual schema discusses his articulation of the body ontologically *being* 'sexuality' and at the same time 'freedom'. Salamon argues that the ambiguity of gender and sexuality in his sexual schema – embodied yet not entirely physical, inescapable yet inchoate – offers a useful understanding of trans embodiment that avoids the typically sexually-bereft model of transsexuality. Her statement that 'sexuality is a matter not of seeing but of sensing,' shifts trans identity and sexual expression towards the material body, though does not concentrate on genitalia (47). To emphasize the relationality of one's sexual schema, Salamon offers a reading of Lana Tisdale's affirmative response to Brandon's 'full flesh' in the 1999 film *Boys Don't Cry*.

The provocations of transgender embodiment to object-oriented sexuality and genital-oriented gender identification continue in Part Two, in which Salamon fashions a trans-inspired queer concept 'homoerratic' and contributes to the notion of 'transfeminism'. A calendar titled ' "Boys" of the Lex,' for San Francisco's dyke bar, featuring transgressively masculine images, provides the grist to her contention that homoeroticism or 'love of the same' is 'insufficient for understanding how this eroticism depends on difference and alterity at the level of sex, of gender, and of bodies' (70). Salamon argues that particularly between transmasculinities erotic power may be generated by difference within sameness, or masculinities that 'wander or stray from their customary or expected courses in unpredictable and surprising ways' (71). Her assertion that the body's morphology does not script either identification or desire is expanded in the next chapter's settling of a dispute with women's studies' investment in the referentiality of the body (its sex signs) to attest to gender identity. Chapter Four's interest in 'the future of gender' addresses the caricatured and distorted face of transsexualism given in many feminist accounts, indicating that feminist thought lags behind non-normative genders are they are theorized, embodied, and lived. This chapter carefully discusses the connections and disconnections in the project of transgender studies and feminism as well as queer theory via reference to *LGB- fake T community* organization.

In Part Three, 'Transcending Sexual Difference', Salamon more strongly advances a transdisciplinary project that wrestles over rightful use of terminology. Critically identifying the limits or hostility of a theoretical framework, Salamon takes sexual difference feminism to task. She mobilizes an American-influenced gender studies approach, which engages the heterosexual matrix, in framing her critique of French-styled essentialist feminism. She offers a queer or 'nonheteronormative' read-

ing of the sexuate body in Luce Irigaray's work in order to intervene in the 'hylomorphic' conceptualization of sexual difference as reduced to genital difference. She seeks to expose a trans-phobic body politics in which 'materialism' simply means the supposed 'material' limits of gender plasticity and 'sexual difference' refers to an immaterial body that is capable of almost limitless reconfiguration. Chapter Six addresses Elizabeth Grosz's sporadic commentary on transsexualism; Salamon sees that Grosz's brief invocations belie the crucial (and debilitating) role for the transsexual as a sexuate limit in her modeling of sexual difference as a theory of corporeal becoming. Salamon counters Grosz' reference to the 'law' of the biological body's sexual facticity – 'pure difference' – with lived realities of gender variance and flux cited by American feminists.

The hylomorphic law of sexual difference reappears in the legal lettering of male (m) and female (f) that marks documents as it ideologically 'marks' the body. In the concluding chapter on sex as a bounded property, much like a territory, the notion of trans specificity becomes most emphatic. Via an examination of the autobiographical trope and the reality of border crossing, Salamon offers a critique of property rights nested in nationalistic rhetoric. For the transsexual 'beyond the law,' she stresses the difficulty of ownership of one's body. Unlike normatively gendered people, transsexuals caught between conflicting sex and gender recognition laws cannot safely 'assume' a stable and identifiable body: 'the depth of that misrecognition,' stresses Salamon, 'puts the stakes at nothing less than life itself' (193).

In the 1998 introduction to 'The Transgender Issue' of the journal GLQ, Susan Stryker prophetically proposed that, to a large extent, 'work in transgender studies will consist of definitional wrangling until a better consensus emerges of who deploys these terms, in which contexts, and with what intent' (149). Some battles seem fueled not only by the inevitable power struggles, but also by disciplinary mistrust and misunderstanding. Throughout the book Salamon's precise use of terminology gently guides her reader through a complex and perhaps newly discovered disciplinary terrain. Considering its numerous audiences, *Assuming a Body's* achievement of clarity in conducting disciplinary encounters provides a much-needed model as well as resource for transgender scholarship. Such research as Salamon's that may be qualified as disciplinarily 'forthcoming' will hopefully encourage more fruitful engagements between various territories of knowledge production.

This study of the body through its re-presentation in rhetoric could benefit from an even more explicit acknowledgment of its 'object' of analysis, particularly when the body

discussed is materialized by a legal ruling, a literary text, a photograph, or a film. As the title announces, the book focuses on the *rhetoric* of materiality yet, its analysis often shifts to a cultural object to provide counterclaims to traditional texts. These objects, I might propose, perform embodiment in dimensions beyond textual rhetoric; their medium-specificity also seems to resist a purely 'textual' reading. Further confusing the matter, 'rhetoric' largely remains an undefined term. Hence, I suggest that a careful delimitation of object selection, in which the corpus would be accounted for just as rigorously as the wide-range of concepts, would helpfully draw out the assumptions of Salamon's own 'rhetoric' of the body.

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