

Abstract:

What, how, and who is transbutch? In this thesis, I examine memoirs and personal essays that define and defy boundaries between “butch” and “transmasculine” subjectivity — and investigate my own queer experience in the process — in order to counter the myth of an irreparable trans/butch divide. Deemed by some to be “border wars,” conflicts between transness and butchness are emblematic of the contested (hi)stories on which the identities are founded: namely, white supremacy, colonialism, transmedicalism, and lesbian separatism/trans-exclusionary radical feminism. Ensuing identity-battles — which have increased with increased access to biomedical transition — rely on a teleological approach to identity, and, I argue, may only be ameliorated by prioritizing experiential multiplicity and political affinity over fixed, essential truth. Through engagement with a variety of personal narratives by authors such as S. Bear Bergman, Ivan Coyote, Rae Spoon, and blogger MainelyButch, I counter the understanding of identity as intrinsic and immutable, showing instead the dynamism of transbutch life, its stretchiness as a personal and community signifier, and its constant re-definition by its occupants.

Enacting Transbutch:
Queer Narratives Beyond Essentialism

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[To you I owe
The language I have
become]

¹ Genderless autistic activist and personal hero of mine, Mel Baggs, died of respiratory failure on April 11, 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Vocabulary Guide

Lowercasing of “europe,” “america,” etc.:

Words have power, and so does the respect we afford them. By flouting the conventional “propering” of nouns like these, I aim to draw attention to the commonsensical authority we afford to standard american english, and allow readers to question these facets of language we are trained to take as gospel.

Sexgender:

A term that refers to the mutually-constitutive relationship between “sex” (a biologized version of binary gender) and “gender” (the ostensible enacted result of “sexed” behavior as well as the social inventor of sexualized characteristics). I will sometimes use phrases like “male-man” and “female-woman” to discuss essentialist practices and attitudes that present the two as necessarily identical.

TERF:

Stands for “trans-exclusionary radical feminist.” The biological-essentialist ideological contemporaries and descendants of Dworkin, Jefferys, Raymond, and more, who approach female-womanhood and lesbianism with nationalistic fervor (hence the term “cultural feminist”). Their fiercest vitriol is directed toward trans women — deemed appropriators attempting to penetrate the borders of female-womanhood. They also, as I discuss, hold a particular pity, fear, and loathing for various assigned-female/transmascul-

line people — deemed woman-hating traitors and/or delusional victims of patriarchal brainwashing.

TMA (transmisogyny-affected):

A nonessentialist way of referring to people who are the primary targets of transmisogyny, usually (though not exclusively) those who are assigned male at birth.

TME (transmisogyny-exempt):

A nonessentialist way of referring to people who are not the primary targets of transmisogyny, usually (though not exclusively) those who are assigned female at birth.

Transbutch (Trans(/)butch):

Variously, an identity/political project between, encompassing, questioning, and incorporating aspects of what is called “transness” and what is called “butchness.” Also a tool through which I analyze the narratives I discuss, and a lens we invite others and ourselves to look through at our bodies/experiences. An acknowledgement that trans(and)butch existences are culturally, temporally, and in the context of who we are speaking with.

Transmedicalist (“Truscum”² casually/pejoratively):

² “true-trans” scum.

Those who believe that legitimate transness exists in a given person when and only when they also have diagnosed gender dysphoria. Transmedicalists most often propagate the narrative of born-this-way, binary transness, in which one from early childhood knew themselves³ to be “born in the wrong body.” Rather than an identity per se, the fact of being transgender is to them a disease to be cured by medical intervention. Meanwhile, they mark those insufficiently or improperly “dysphoric” as inherently non-trans, attempting to gatekeep access to terminology, community, and medical care.

³ Though given the anti-nonbinary sentiment popular among transcum, perhaps I should say “his-or-herself”.

Abbreviation Guide

Below is a list of in-text citation abbreviations, in alphabetical order.

ARG: The Argonauts by Maggie Nelson

B: Borderlands / La Frontera by Gloria Anzaldúa

BAAN: Butch is a Noun by S. Bear Bergman.

E: Emergence: A Transsexual Autobiography by Mario Martino

GF: Gender Failure by Ivan Coyote and Rae Spoon

GO: Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation by Kate Bornstein and S. Bear Bergman, eds.

MB: MainelyButch (blog) by the blogger also referred to as MainelyButch (MB)

PM: PoMoSexuals: Challenging Assumptions about Gender and Sexuality by Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel, eds.

TBSG: Tomboy Survival Guide by Ivan Coyote

TNE: The Nearest Exit May Be Behind You by S Bear Bergman

UB: Unbound: Transgender Men and the Remaking of Identity by Arlene Stein

XY: Outside the XY: A Bklyn Boihood Anthology by Morgan Mann Willis, ed.

INTRODUCTION

This discussion starts, as all discussions do, in the middle of many idioms and vernaculars and at the point where many genealogies converge.

—(Lauren Berlant & Lee Edelman).¹

Between the year I first purchased the laptop I still use today, 2015, and January of 2020, I did not once update my software. I was only vaguely aware that I was fighting a losing battle. I was (and am) fortunate to have been able to keep my old computer around for this long, given an inarguable trend toward early technological obsolescence. But my computer did begin to cause me problems in January 2020, screen periodically glitching and going black, requiring a full restart. One time, when I attempted such a restart, my computer refused to comply. It was midnight. I was, unwisely, working on this thesis.

The following day, I went to the Apple store, driving for more than an hour in the snow. The “genius” assigned to fix my laptop was a very attractive, short-haired woman in her late twenties, heavily decorated with piercings and tattoos, black tunnels in her gauged ears. We made small talk, she said some hardly-understandable computer-related jargon and I nodded along, trusting. She asked me why I was there, given the snow and ice. I explained the urgency: I was a student writing a thesis: a laptop out of commission was to me as two broken legs were to a runner.

“What's your thesis about?” She asked. I sized her up. Piercings, tattoos, stretched ears; short and likely-dyed hair, wearing clothes I liked.

¹ Berlant, Lauren, and Lee Edelman. *Sex, or the Unbearable*. Duke University Press, 2014. p. x.

I said, “well, it’s a little complicated, but basically...I’m looking at transmasculine and butch lesbian narratives, figuring out the similarities and differences and conflicts, trying to understand and challenge this idea of “border wars,” between the two, building solidarity based in affinity and not just shared ‘essence’...yeah, if any of that makes sense.”

She ran diagnostics on my laptop as I spoke.

I continued nervously, filling the silence. Part of the problem with talking about my thesis is not only that it’s quite niche and therefore unimportant to the majority of people I talk to, but also that in disclosing it I’m also, effectively, coming out as a member of that niche. “So, like, if this idea of ‘butch flight’ — butches leaving lesbianism to supposedly become trans men — is a real thing, how do I fit into that as someone who started out identifying as trans way before I realized I could be butch? And now, I’ve never been a butch or lesbian and not also been trans? Why does becoming one or the other mean abandoning the community you were in before? Anyway, I’ll admit I’m a lot more comfortable talking about this stuff with you given all your body mods.”

She laughed. “Yeah, I like yours too. That’s really interesting. My wife’s a butch and all her old friends are trans now, it’s wild. Anyway, your thesis is all backed up, right? We’re going to have to wipe your computer and reinstall newer software.

*

Narrative is the architectural substance of my identity. I am made in the pipes and gears of language. The stories I tell about myself, the stories told of me by others, and the stories demanded of me by authorities, constitute the person that I “am” — that I present to the world and believe myself to be. In the case of marginalized identity, these narratives of self are frequently-

violent and even more frequently-violated. Ideological conflicts and political interests appear to make dirty stories whose cleanliness was never assured, and, with increasing frequency, we find recourse to essentialism to explain the stories whose tensions we are unwilling to sit in.

If this is what you believe yourself to be, you are it.

I could write this thesis about a million different identificatory, community conflicts, but right now I choose to write about that which is most urgent to my personal life, one whose taffy-like, multidirectional pull stretches me thin on a bed of uncertain language. I have ultimately chosen to examine memoirs and personal essays that defy and define boundaries between “butch” and “transmasculine” subjectivity, investigating my own queer experience in the process. I’ve been cautioned against calling this thesis “autoethnographic.” It is true that this is not so much an investigation of a culture of transbutchness, and more an investigation of transbutchness as a theoretical lens. Still, I’m not sure what to call it, and it might not have a name. No matter what I call it, this thesis is, first and foremost, about questions that are central to my becoming. I ask, what is transbutch? What does it do and what can I do with it? If I am to self-describe with this portmanteau I need to know why. I am thus writing my life narrative (thus far) alongside my analyses of the published memoirs and personal essays of others I will analyze in order to figure this out.

Butchness and transmasculinity, butchness and manhood: these have become such zones of contact and conflict that these fights have been cast as “border wars” by scholars, in particular Jack Halberstam, author of *Female Masculinity* (1998). Historically, culturally, and temporally-

contingent terminologies and political affiliations — still very much in flux and with no sign of settling — are applied to similar-appearing bodyminds, leading us to ask, “would today’s trans-masculine person have been a butch woman before? Would this or that butch decide today to transition? Are butches obsolete? Should we retroactively *trans* those butches who appear to have been dysphoric?”

The dichotomous nature of these yes/no questions indicates that they are the wrong ones to ask of a profoundly queer problem. No matter one’s position in these trans(or)butch conflicts, the belief in “inherent” identities pervades. With this truth will come a confirmed community, history, and projected future. Just as we are trained to believe that society is on a long march toward truth and progress, we expect the same from individual identity and for the identificatory trends of specific groups. Transition after a life of butchness becomes a perceived-indictment of butchness writ large, transition a move toward progress and self-realization. Trans identification becomes suspicious as butches fear declining ranks. Butch lesbians and transmasculine people face a literal manifestation of what they falsely believe to be true: that they — we, collectively — have nothing in common. The “sides” are mutually exclusive and irreconcilably different.

On one side sit TERFs — nominally-feminist reactionaries who demand the expulsion of trans women from “female space” and mark transmasculine people as sex traitors, fearing “butch flight.”² They believe increasing access to biomedical transition is causing a mass butch extinction, that a homogenized “trans movement” is stealing butches from lesbianism. On the other sit transmedicalists, who advocate biomedical intervention to correct inherently “wrong” bodies in pursuit of “true transness.” In both cases — and in most critical responses to them — the notion

² Lee, Atticus. “The Role of Butch/Femme Relationships in Transgender Activism: A Codependent Mutualism.” *Stanford Undergraduate Research Journal*, 2009, pp. 18–23.

that essential truths of sexuality and gender exist remains unquestioned. Such beliefs are rampant in our stories, which we take to be not the *invention* of our identities but mere *evidence* of their a priori truthiness.

At this interstice, I intervene. As increasing numbers of narratives establishing trans(or)butch positionality emerge, both calcify not only into genders but coherent genres³ in which our bodies of work may reside. As a result, we see a limiting of identificatory possibility, which when tied to an essentialist view of sexgender, forecloses the queer potentialities of a wide number of people. It silences their stories before they may be realized and spoken. It also predicates identity change (especially biomedical “transition”) upon total disavowal of the prior self, leaving those who do untethered and without support — if granted permission to cross gender at all. This permission may only be granted to the trans subject presenting a legible (hi)story, that is, a history in line with genre convention; just as the butch is limited in “her” capacity to disidentify with womanhood before being deemed suspicious. Conventional and discrete trans(or)butch categories form positive feedback loops in which we transbutches just feel trapped.⁴

The narrators I study in this work, along with myself, consciously and unconsciously break these genre conventions, expanding the definitions of “trans” and “butch” and even articulating a transbutch countergenre. While by no means immune to trans(/)butch clichés — including, even, clichés particular to these liminal, hybrid-gender stories — the narratives I present critique the essentialization of the trans(or)butch narrator. Instead, they explore what I term “trans-

³ A word originally referring to “gender” in French, I do not engage with the history of “genre” here. I do, however, enjoy playing with the gender-genre connection in the language I use throughout this thesis.

⁴ In *Stone Butch Blues*, Leslie Feinberg’s protagonist, Jess, “just feel[s] trapped,” rather than feeling like a “man trapped in a woman's body”.

butchness,” a term I will define and redefine throughout this thesis in regard to community, self, and political project.

To transbutch is to give (per)mission. Permission where it was never needed. Permission that is in fact a welcome; a call to *travel with the butches* and to trans your way there (PM115).

An exploration of what transbutch means, and even more importantly, what it promises, constitutes the core of my work. I ask numerous questions of my narrators, including myself, not out of a belief that I will find answers but in an attempt to reveal the post-essentialist solidarity that *transbutch* suggests. What can an engagement with transbutchness do to these seemingly-insurmountable borders? Does *transbutch*, itself, suggest a genre-calcification, which will bring with it its own dangerous normativities? What is the value and danger of language in determining where, and to whom, we belong; whether or not we have a "seat at the table"? Need the table itself be swept away, overturned, built anew? Perhaps smaller, so we may recognize our likenesses from across it?

As I have moved through the last decade of my life, my genders, (a)sexualities, and all other aspects of the way I have lived my life have changed dramatically, and I anticipate them continuing to do so, not toward some certain-truth waiting beneath all the fluff, but rather in an ongoing act of trans-formation. I know that my lesbianism cannot be cis, my transness not straight; I am on no binary *side* as I consider both alien. I write, then, to discover my relationship to narrators of experiences in and around the transbutch genre, and these other narrators' relationships to each other and to TERF and transmedical discourse. We live as queers on the fringes

of queerness, sharing perhaps not in “disorder” but in disorderly conduct, throwing a wrench into comfortable images of what “lesbian” and “trans” do.

This thesis is my living wrench, my transbutchness articulating itself through and beside the narrators I study. After more than a year working closely with textual transbutches, in addition to “living into” my own self-among-others, I by no means claim mastery over my writing or language (TNE20). Rather, I drive a queer-shaped wedge into the terms of my existence, thinking about how we (might) redeploy our familiar signifiers and create others anew, manifesting the communities we want rather than those to which we feel confined. What becomes of my words, enwedged, is a collaborative choice between the reader and I. Just as those whose words I’ve held close since early 2019, I ask to be read both with critique and compassion, and hope you like what this piece becomes of you.

Why Narrative? / Meet The Narrators

Before diving deeply into my interwoven analysis of my narrators' (hi)stories, I will briefly introduce you to the narrators and texts we will be working most closely with in this thesis. Narrators not listed by name here, particularly Gloria Anzaldúa and Mario Martino, will also be discussed at length, as well writers of individual, anthologized essays. Listed below are the four narrators with whom I am in greatest conversation about transbutch identity, life, and possibility.

Ivan Coyote (born in 1969) is a Canadian writer, anthology-editor, and performer. I will be looking at their book *Tomboy Survival Guide* (2016), as well as their collaborative work *Gender Failure* (2014) with fellow narrator, Rae Spoon. Coyote is interested in the ever-changing contours and borders of the “lesbian community,” and resists TERFs and other radical feminists, both as a trans person who has faced their bigotry and as an accomplice to TMA trans people. Coyote writes at length about their experience undergoing “medical transition,” illuminating the internal and external conflicts carried in transbutch bodies seeking and failing medical interpellation. They also provide a quintessential childhood “tomboy” narrative, suggesting their transbutch adulthood to be a continuation of their inborn, unshakable tomboy spirit.

Rae Spoon (born in 1982) is a Canadian folk musician who grew up attempting and failing to be a girl in a Pentecostal family. They came out as a trans man in 2002, and a decade later announced their “retirement” from the gender binary. At that time, in 2012, they began perfuming alongside Ivan Coyote; in 2014, the two released their collaborative book *Gender Failure*. Spoon’s narrative could be framed as one of “detransition,” a word used to describe a movement

from prior social/biomedical (as it were) gender transition, “backward” to one’s assigned gender, or perceived assigned gender. But as we will see, Spoon’s movement was more a transition of ideological approach: a movement from the dogmatic transmedicalism of his life as a trans man to a queer, transbutch approach. Spoon’s narrative acts as a corrective to the linear narrative of transition; their manhood ended up just as impossible and restrictive as the womanhood expected of them.

MainleyButch (MB) (born in 1962) is a butch blogger and YouTuber from, as her nickname indicates, Maine. Having had her current blog since 2012, she documents her daily life, political views, personal relationships, and complex relationship to transness and Butchness⁵, maintaining a position of controlled ambivalence toward lesbian women and to transmasculine people. Using testosterone and receiving a mastectomy, but often eschewing the explicit language of trans identity, MB illustrates a constantly-evolving yet historically-grounded butchness, one that can stretch to the spaces reached by transmasculine exploration without changing its name, but one that is nevertheless unafraid to engage with trans community and identity. Like Coyote, MB is also acutely concerned with lesbian anti-transness and anti-butchness, and finds grounds for shared trans(/)butch struggle in the face of this opposition.

S. Bear Bergman (born in 1974) is a trans man and former genderqueer, “gender-jammer” activist and writer. He has contributed writing to numerous anthologies and websites, but I will focus on two essay collections for this thesis: *Butch is a Noun* (2006, 2010) and *The Nearest Exit May Be Behind You* (2009, 2011). These collections track Bergman’s journey through butchness, genderqueerness, and multiple genres of transness, his gender and sexuality changing

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in accordance with his transforming social and romantic/sexual relationships. Bergman's relationship to transbutchness is located both in his lived experience as a trans(and)butch, and also in his crossing from normative manhood into queer effeminacy.

As mentioned, other writers' stories will supplement these primary narratives. In addition to Anzaldúa's and Martino's works, I have lived with texts such as *PoMoSexuals: Challenging Assumptions About Gender and Sexuality* (1997), *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation* (2010), *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme* (2011), *The Argonauts* by Maggie Nelson (2015), *Outside the XY: Queer, Black and Brown Masculinity* (2015), and *Unbound: Transgender Men and the Remaking of Identity* (2018).

Roadmap: A Reading Guide

As a guide to this thesis I offer a roadmap. It is beneficial, though not necessary, to read sections in order and in their entirety, and some readers may benefit from switching the order in which they read sections. Rather than numbering chapters and presenting them as coherent wholes, I use a system of headings and subheadings to arrange my work in smaller chunks. There are sections of this thesis you might read in five minutes. There are sections you might read over five days. These might be the same sections.

My aim is to resist the chronology so often invoked in trans(/)butch conversations, both the macro-chronology that claims transness is a “new” version of butchness, and the micro-chronology that claims each of us to gradually transition toward an eventual *true self*. As we will see, histories do not emerge and fade, but repeat in new shapes and with new actors; new identities forged across spacial and temporal grounds reinvoke conflicts not truly past. Using a constellation of small stories rather than sweeping, successive chapters, I invite curiosity and play with-in this text we co-create, while, I hope, alleviating the pressure to engage in a normative reading.

Below, I will explain the contents of each section and explain my reasoning for the order I chose to place them in. Sections moved frequently throughout the construction of this thesis, and while by no means the only way one might read it, the organization I have decided on is intentional.

In section one, “Transmedical (Hi)stories: Racializing Gender,” I draw attention to the racist — specifically, anti-Black and settler colonial — frameworks of understanding gender that gave rise to the contemporary gender binary as well as its dissidents, noting that gender-nonconformity itself cannot be conceptualized outside the shadow of a white supremacist and settler-

colonialist gender binary. I consider this in further detail via anthologies like *Outside the XY* and parts of *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme*, as well as through a trans reading of *Borderlands / La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa. Contemporary western understandings of gender and sexuality — even ostensible “progressive” approaches to queer/transness — are rooted in a gender binary indebted to colonialism and chattel slavery. Before entering conversation with trans-buttness’s “post-identity” possibilities, it is necessary to address the logics undergirding gender and sexuality as it is commonly understood.

In section two, “Transmedicine: A Diagnostic (Hi)story,” I describe and challenge transmedical discourses which essentialize and often biologize transmasculinity, considering it to be an ontologically distinct category from buttness based on the experience of diagnosable gender dysphoria. Mario Martino's 1977 autobiography, *Emergence*, exemplifies this ideology and the transnormative narrative it demands. I address the stakes and implications of his story at length. I also locate my own ambivalent experiences — both resisting transmedical narrative convention and also appearing, in many ways, as a stereotypically-dysphoric subject — within this history.

In section three, “Buttness in Context,” I outline the context and legacy of buttn-hatred within lesbian communities, which has since mutated into “buttn flight” anxieties. I outline some aspects of buttn/femme bar culture and the rise of cultural feminism, not as a totalizing view of “lesbian history” but as a way of understanding assumptions and attitudes my narrators — particularly MainelyButtn and Ivan Coyote — encounter in ambivalent pursuit of transmedical intervention.

In section four, “Transbuttn Lives, Transbuttn Futures,” I begin a more in-depth exploration of individuals’ transbuttn stories, beginning with Coyote’s top surgery, and moving into an

analysis of transbutch narrative clichés and possible sites of resistance. After this, I discuss terms like “quare” and “double-trans” which have informed the development of transbutchness. I also address — as is necessary for a transbutch author named Sarah — the significance of personal- and community-naming and the use of the name-change as a transition trope. Then, I turn to S. Bear Bergman’s unruly transition from butch to trans man, offering “effeminacy” as one genre of transbutch experience.

Lastly, in what I’ve titled an “Inconclusion,” I address several possible limitations on the transbutch solidarity I aim for, as well as both textual and lived counterpoints to these concerns. Rather than discovering answers to questions of inclusion and relationality in and across our communities, I offer scenes from my life and others’ as well as commentary. My hope is that the questions I pose in this final section will be taken up and contested by others, and that the gender abolitionist call I ultimately make will inform whatever becomes of this thing called “transbutch.”

Who I Cite

This section, initially, was going to include primary-sourced books, papers, and other documents from cultural feminists and their descendants, today known (and sometimes even self-identifying as) TERFs (trans exclusionary radical feminists)⁶. I also considered investigating the curious trend of self-proclaimed “dysphoric females” attempting to monopolize transbutch terminology, for the implicit and explicit purposes of denying trans women access to the word that is rightfully theirs to claim — transbutch, as I will illustrate throughout this thesis, is no more physiologically bound than terms like “man” or “woman”— transbutch is a political and ideological approach, a description for a collection of embodiments that evade other definition.

When I initially conceived this project, I was fascinated at the specter of studying detransition narratives, the narratives of people (almost always women) who had spent time as non-women, and had later (de)transitioned back to womanhood. A disproportionate number of such people, I noticed, were TERFs, trying to warn young people not to start hormones or receive surgery as if an anti-drug classroom speaker trying to scare them straight. I embarked on a quest to find narratives of detransition that would help me illuminate an anti-essentialist, dynamic conception of gender that would inform transbutchness as a practice and topic. Unfortunately, what I got over months of research was the uncomfortable knowledge that finding non-cissexist detransition narratives was not like searching for a needle in a haystack, but hay in a needle-stack.

⁶ Most sources, including this comprehensive history from “TheTERFs,” an online critical overview of TERF rhetoric, and a vital resource for those who want to familiarize themselves with TERF talking points and arm themselves with the tools to counter them. The site cites the original coiner of the term as a radical feminist herself, who wanted to distinguish herself from the TERF contingent, to create a dividing line between radical feminists who were anti-trans and radical feminists who supported transness. See “TERF: Where the Term Comes From.” The TERFs, 11 Oct. 2013, theterfs.com/2013/10/11/terf-where-the-term-comes-from/.

Surely, such narratives existed, but I wasn't going to keep swimming through a pile of sharp objects in order to locate them.

At the same time, I was actively increasing my consumption of trans woman-created content. This content chiefly addressed the lesbian, trans, and/or queer discourses that frequently erased and degraded those subject to transmisogyny. I also reflected on a growing number of articles urging activists to *deplatform* reactionaries, rather than engage them in “civil” debate or academic discourse. Tumblr blogger trans-girl-waiting expresses the conclusion I ultimately came to like this [emphasis mine]:

I'm gonna say that in general, your snappy comebacks to bigots online are not funny enough to justify making the people who are hurt most by them look at their takes[.]

Is it worth it to expose someone's hate manifesto to a wider audience just so you can say “yikes” or “no you”? Usually no!! Especially if you're not the main victim of the kind of hate being spread[.]⁷

I have chosen, therefore, to not cite TERFs, deeming them, as Kate Bornstein does, to be “gender terrorists.”⁸ I present their points of view only for the purposes of debunking them both on moral and on theoretical grounds. I will not treat TERF ideology as merely another “point of view” worthy of debate. Instead I will present it for what it is: a vehicle for white supremacist sexgender essentialism, and thus — despite the claims of its adherents — patriarchy.⁹

⁷ Trans-Girl-Waiting. Dyko: Drum Master, 29 May 2019, trans-girl-waiting.tumblr.com/post/185230643988/.

⁸ Bornstein, Kate. “Gender Terror, Gender Rage.” *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, Routledge, 2006, pp. 236–243.

⁹ Strongorcbutch, Eve. *The Phrenology of the Modern TERF, Everyone*. 13 July 2019, strongorcbutch.tumblr.com/post/186257272337.

Rather than cite TERFs, I take this thesis as an opportunity to cite understudied and delegitimized works, particularly those by trans woman bloggers, many of whom write at the cutting edge of trans theorization. Trans women, and other transmisogyny-affected (TMA) people, are in the greatest danger of TERF violence, and thus their critiques take priority in the fight against TERFs. With TMA people routinely excluded from the bounds of academia, and whose ability to self-define is stripped on the basis of “deflated credibility” and delegitimized knowledge, I take this thesis as an opportunity not to “figure out” TERF ideology or subjectivity, but to illuminate the knowledges of those silenced by them.¹⁰ The history of transbutchness is one dotted by violence against those who defy the sexgender binary. The stories I tell do not downplay or obscure the violence, but practice epistemic rectification in their retelling.

¹⁰ Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press, 2011. p. 4.

Autobiography (Where am I?)

I'm Sarah. I use they/them pronouns. I grew up as a girl in the northeastern-most margin of Connecticut in a rural town that straddled the line between working- and middle-class, proximate in geography and culture to several post-industrial towns in whose mills my great-grandparents once worked. Residents often had grandparents and great-grandparents who lived in that same county. Families stayed put. Majority-white, with a large Catholic population, this was the only county in Connecticut that favored Obama in 2012 but flushed red in 2016.

I was raised by my mother and father, as well as my paternal grandparents (who lived a five-minute drive from my home), with no siblings. I began school at four, in kindergarten, and within a year had been placed in occupational therapy, the first of a litany of encounters with the "psy-professions". I began attending Catholic school instead of local public school when I was in sixth grade, and within a year entered what might be termed "queer digital space," finding on Tumblr a mixture of "social justice" (rudimentary anti-racist, anti-cisheteropatriarchal, anti-ableist, and later, explicitly anti-capitalist blogging and information-sharing with like-minded peers, most of whom were under thirty and a majority of whom were not yet eighteen.)

Between the approximate ages of eleven and fourteen, I remained in these digital communities with a wholly concealed "actual" identity, sometimes under my own name and sometimes under the nickname "Star" (a long-desired name, borne of my boredom with the apparent-pedestrianness of "Sarah" and *not* of deep-seated "dysphoria") and usually of fake ages ranging from sixteen to twenty. After age fifteen, I stopped concealing my actual identity, and since then, slowly, have been reuniting with myself. I remained, meanwhile, in Catholic schools from sixth through twelfth grades, by choice though with increasing ambivalence.

Before my digital coming-of-age, I had already had exposure to LGBTQ-ness. My great-aunt had come out as transgender when I was seven or eight. Another aunt had at the time recently divorced her husband in order to marry a woman. Until a combination of digital exposure, and increasing exposure by my new friends at school (and the group of people I spent several nights a week with at community theater and chorus), my views on gayness were largely negative. I hypothesize this was a projection of self-hatred and an internalization of my grandfather's habitual comments that being gay was a bona fide mental illness, and that being trans was "just weird." Since then, I should note, he and my grandmother have experienced great character growth, and I have come out to them as what I sometimes call "regular gay *and* gender gay".

Between eleven and seventeen, I had gone through numerous different genders and sexualities. I don't believe all temporary identities to be "fake" or "mistaken," and some of my own temporary identities were correct for my own purposes. Nonetheless, in hindsight, some of them were founded on misguided principles. I once believed my only identificatory option was pansexuality/panromanticism (a term used by some instead of bisexuality for attraction independent from or regardless of gender) simply because I was nonbinary. After all, normative understandings of the LGB, especially in 2013, did not allow for ungendered wiggle-room. You couldn't be attracted to the same and opposite "sex" if you, the subject, were the same as and opposite to nothing. At the time, highly-specific, creative, personalized sexualities and genders were a mode of communication among queer and trans youth in my social circles, as opposed to considered, concerted liminality. For lack of a better term, this was object-choice sexuality on steroids.

I also believed, for a time, that I had to partially identify myself with womanhood simply because I wore dresses. In this I was simply wrong — in my view, a mode of identification is

wrong when and only when it's grounded in a false and/or unethical reading of what that term is and does. My past girlhood, my past bi/pan-ness, my past use of the term "asexual": these are not wrong just because they are no longer happening to me. However, my past exclusive use of pan- instead of bi- to describe multi-gender attraction *was* grounded in false assumptions (this is how I define "wrong" identities, rather than deeming all not-currently-held identities as inherently-incorrect). After all, the term "bisexual" has long signified attraction to two *or more* genders, that is, genders both like and unlike one's own.¹¹

With all this in mind, I return to my own ongoing identity — my *regular-gay-and-gender-gay self*. The word transbutch frees me from static identity by describing instead, a process, history, and relationship, one I have the pleasure of exploring here.

¹¹ Eisner, Shiri. "Why I Identify as Bisexual and Not Pansexual." Bi Radical, 27 Sept. 2011, radicalbi.wordpress.com/2011/09/27/why-i-identify-as-bisexual-and-not-pansexual/.

Why (am I) Transbutch?

Regular gay and gender gay; a lesbian and (because, to the point that I become...) *trans-but*ch. I've been many different things throughout my life, some of which I'll discuss later on, where relevant. It is this transbutchness, which I have only since the start of this project referred to as such, that lies at the center of everything I've been (doing) since mid-2018. It is transbutchness that this thesis hopes to provide several definitions of, or at least, inroads-to-definitions-of. As a means of introducing the term and its significance, here is what transbutchness means to me, and the stories of queerness and transness I can reflect in my explanation:

Firstly, I am transbutch because:

- 1) I said so.
- 2) I have employed “medical” and “social” “transitions” (and yes, all of the scare quotes really *are* necessary) as means of making myself, and making myself butchable. That is, I could and would not do butchness the way that I do if I had not had discursive and material access to transness.
- 3) An understanding of me as trans is an incomplete one unless read alongside and through my butch lesbianism.
- 4) My butchness “crosses” into atypical effeminacy, thus “transing” away from standard understandings of what butch is.
- 5) My transness and butchness make each other better. More fun. Each lets me be creative with the other, and being transbutch, simultaneously, is fulfilling, challenging, exciting, and intellectually stimulating.

On an everyday level, I'm transbutch simply because I am transgender and a butch lesbian at the same time. Although I like using the term "transgender" in full, I don't often use it with people I am unfamiliar with, because that often leads to others believing I am a trans woman. This is an experience that I, having been coercively assigned (that is, *diagnosed*) "female" at birth, cannot claim. Rather than attempt transmisogynistically to "reclaim" transbutch, as if somehow TMA transbutches have "stolen" the term, I place myself alongside like-experienced others of all birth assignments and all bodies. I consistently find that I have far more in common with others outside or against the sexgender binary, than I do with those who might define themselves as "butches" but still reify the institution of sex. That said, I necessarily acknowledge my position as someone not directly impacted by transmisogyny; as a theorist of transbutchness who in this thesis only addresses a sliver of transbutch experience. Rather than owning transbutchness, I enact it. I do not view sexgender as innate, static, or in any way ontological truths of our respective bodyminds¹². Genders are class categories as well as points of potential solidarity, however they are always-already under the influence of other privileges and marginalizations, as well as subjects' and communities ever-changing modes of identification. As blogger Eve writes:

"Trans" as an umbrella can be useful for solidarity and for talking about where experiences overlap, but if you use it to silence groups that fall under that umbrella but that you personally aren't a part of, you done fucked up. You're poking holes in the umbrella over people who have important differences from you that have real impact on their lives. If

¹² A term that gestures to the "inextricable relationships between our bodies and our minds." Clare, Eli. *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*. Duke University Press, 2017. p. xvi.

you're a trans person who isn't a trans woman, do not speak over those who are. Do not use "trans" as a shield to do so.¹³

Those who claim a binary between trans and butch practice — both transmedicalists and TERFs — engage in an active, willful ignorance of the temporal, cultural, social, and relational contingencies around identity. Transbutchness would not exist as it does without these hostile forces. These forces would themselves would not exist without more than a century of formal and informal pathologization of queer and trans embodiment. This is the circle of pain, fear, and loss that has animated the so-called "trans/butch border wars": in response to violent cissexism, transmedicalists seek to assert their legitimacy through that very violent system; TERFs seek purity-as-liberation through the patriarchal construct of "sex." The trans/butch border wars mark our bodies and lives as battlegrounds; I find myself more often being fought over, on top of, around, and with, than I find myself as a "[gender] warrior."¹⁴

While this term, transbutch, will not ameliorate conflicts between trans people (and) butches, I use both this word and the narratives that give it meaning to show liminal possibilities that do not devolve into sectarian violence. At the very least, this work has quieted the battles I wage within my own head, allowing me to step beyond endless questions about my own trans(/)butch legitimacy. It has also allowed me to start these conversations with others, conversations queer and trans people of all stripes have been curious and enthusiastic to engage in. Even for those firmly committed to butchness (or) transness at the exclusion of the other — and

¹³ Strongorcbutch, Eve. There's contexts in which umbrellas are helpful... 30 Oct. 2018, strongorcbutch.tumblr.com/post/179566368214/.

¹⁴ After Leslie Feinberg's 1996 book, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*.

this alone does not inherently imply prejudice — I have used my work as a way to start conversations about what identity and community mean, especially in the wake of all those historical, medical forces surrounding us.

We all come into gender — as a system and as an experience of self — as if we have been responsible for it always. As if we each have been jailed for wandering unwittingly into a crime scene not of our making. Transbutch, then, is what I'm doing with this mess I've got: the rubble that collects when our selves become and unbecome diagnoses, political positions, and, we imagine, intrinsic truths. As we attempt to make sense and be made sense of in the shadow of gender, and as we attempt to construct sense-making stories of ourselves and “our people.” To understand the story of transbutch is to understand the story of our names: *invert*, *homosexual*, *gay*, *lesbian*, *masculine-of-center*, *butch*, *dyke*, *stone*, *queer*, *transsexual*, *transgender*, *nonbinary*, *genderless*, *genderqueer*, even *sufferer of dysphoria*. This, unfortunately, is the story of pathologization: the transformation of everyday life — behavior, attributes, views, and more — into medical diagnoses to be treated. This is where the “battle” starts.

TRANSMEDICAL (HI)STORIES: RACIALIZING GENDER

Most of transbutchness's most celebrated and well-known voices, of the past and of the present, are white, although *transbutch*, like all other sexualities and sexgenders, would not be legible if not against a backdrop of white supremacy and colonialism. The presumed whiteness of the butch, and of the trans subject in general, is rooted in the assumption of the universal white subject. Under a regime of gendered racialization, ideal cis embodiment is white, and thus the default trans person is also white, having crossed from a prior state of gender-normalcy to one of transgression. Under a system of settler colonialism and white supremacy, white people are afforded individual gendered, including trans, subjectivity. At the same time, racialized Others become regarded as gender-undifferentiated masses (particularly in the case of anti-Blackness) or, in the case of Indigenous genders, historical artifacts. White trans individuality itself rests on a refusal to afford that individuality to trans people of color.

Not only does the notion of individual, white trans (“or”) butch subjects neglect the ways that identities are formed through relationships, it also restricts who is visibly transbutch to those authorized by medico-legal systems. Such restriction foreshadows a major element of the metaphorized transbutch border wars: only certain genres of identity are deemed legibly trans, and only legible transness is permitted to access a wide variety of medical, legal, and social privileges, including intra-community recognition and legitimacy.¹ For this reason, trans people of color are routinely denied access to “real transness” at the expense of their white, often-wealthy counterparts; a process enabled by the domination not only of white trans identity but also white

¹ See Beauchamp, Toby. “Surveillance.” *Postposttranssexual: Key Concepts for a 21st Century Transgender Studies*, edited by Paisley Currah and Susan Stryker, Duke University Press, 2014, pp. 208–210 and Spade, Dean. “Resisting Medicine, Re/Modeling Gender.” *Berkeley Women's Law Journal*, 2003, pp. 15–37., doi:10.15779/Z38NK3645G.

trans narrative. Racial logics grounded in anti-Blackness and settler colonialism produce white north american gender (binary and otherwise). The binary of cis and trans itself relies on a racialized sexgender binary. It upholds the idea that there will exist enough consistency within an assigned “sex” that crossing, too, will look (and be named) the same for everyone.

This was a reality I spent several months avoiding at the beginning of this project, fearing my own impotence as a white researcher in discussing such issues. How would I “bring race into” trans(/)butchness, I wondered, when my own experience was defined by its perceived-absence? How, moreover, to frame transbutchness in terms of my privilege rather than as the sum total of my social grievances? After all, my goal is to escape the confines of normative gender. This was only possible because I had first lived as not just a girl, but a white girl: I was a legible gender-crosser because I had previously appeared legibly — not “pathologically” — cis. I was previously readable as a girl within an ableist, white supremacist, cissexist framework of gender, only crossing out of normative gender in declaring that I was nonbinary. In short, I struggled to conceptualize a transness that also had an “unruly” starting point: one that did not defect from a socially-acceptable position but remained consistently outside it.

I first turned to *Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe* by Hortense Spillers, a seminal work in the Afro-pessimist tradition that I will return to in the following section on gender and anti-Blackness. While Spillers herself is a cis woman, this piece and its relevance to the production of white gender exemplifies nominally-cis scholars’ capacities to engage in trans scholarship². As part of a larger argument against the pathologization of Black families, particularly through the trope of the “absent father,” Spillers describes the simultaneous hypersexualization and degendering of

² That is, rather than being restricted to the purview of individuals who self-identify as trans, trans scholarship may be defined by its *approach* to gender, regardless of author identification.

enslaved women³. Enslaved people were thus forced outside the bounds of “cisness” and white heteronormativity, just as they were refused the trappings of binary gender. Presuppositions of sexgender-deviance linger to this day, including in the queer and trans organizing that deems white queer and trans people its default subjects. Such spaces of sanctioned (white) difference readily exclude queer and trans people of color. As Cathy Cohen writes, such queer-centric spaces enabled white queers to engage in a “single-oppression framework” that presupposed “deviant’ sexuality as the prominent characteristic of [queer peoples’] marginalization.⁴ C. Riley Snorton, author of *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, is among those who take up this conundrum, uses the concept of “double-transness” in order to “move *beyond* matters of gender” [emphasis in original] and describe the book’s examination of both “transitive and transversal” relationships.⁵ Trans- crosses gender, space, time, and more, and is not restricted to trans-identified individual subjects.

However, “white, imperialist, heteronormative, patriarchy” continues to allow white transness “[to be] naturalized and reified as the cultural barometer against which all else is measured” (XY29). At the same time, as Aliyah Khan writes, it uses historical, often-racialized examples of gender and sexual nonconformity as a readily-available “‘veracity archive’,” meant to prove the transhistorical and cross-cultural existence of “definitively homosexual subjects.”⁶

Much as Cohen and Snorton refuse the whitewashed interpretive frameworks offered by main-

³ Spillers, Hortense. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction*, Racked & Dispatched, 2017.

⁴ Cohen, C. J. “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1997, pp. 441; 447. doi:10.1215/10642684-3-4-437.

⁵ Snorton, C. Riley. *Black on Both Sides: a Racial History of Trans Identity*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017. p 8.

⁶ Khan, Aliyah. “Voyages across Indenture.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2016, pp. 252; 259, doi:10.1215/10642684-3428771.

stream understandings of queer identity, Khan reveals a gap between the expectations of white, contemporary queer subjectivity and the desires of historical Indo-Caribbeans. Yet even as white queer movements call back to possible historical queernesses of color, they treat race less as a terrain of struggle and more as a metaphor in demands for (white) queer and trans liberation. Not only are queer and trans people of color erased in this formulation, but anti-racist struggles, specifically Black struggles, are deemed “passé [...] [having] objectively passed on its reference point to gay, which is not black, and which apparently needs it more.”⁷ In short, hegemonic queer and trans forces attempt both to establish legitimacy through, and deny legitimacy *to*, queer and trans people of color, advancing the notion that a definitively queer/trans subjectivity against a backdrop of prior-normalcy is the only way to engage in gender/sexual crossing.

The scholars and narrators I discuss offer an alternative pathway, in which gender and sexuality emerge in concert with and in debt to racialization, culture, geography, religion, class, ability, size, and more. Not only are queer of color narratives vital to reflecting a transbutchness that refuses resolution and embraces multiplicity — a transbutchness indicated by but also in contrast with the most popular narratives of the emerging genre — but they also help me to lay bare the limits of siloed trans identity. Some sources I will explore in the following sections include *Outside the XY*, an anthology edited by Morgan Mann Willis and affiliated with the bklyn boihood collective,⁸ narratives in *Persistence: A Butch/Femme Reader*, and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*. These stories, I will argue, stretch the boundaries of what constitutes a “trans narrative” from the realm of self-identified status to action and experience.

⁷ Bassichis, Morgan and Dean Spade. “Queer Politics and Anti-Blackness.” *Queer Necropolitics*, edited by Jin Haritaworn, Routledge, 2014, p. 204.

⁸ “About BBH.” Bklyn Boihood, Bklyn Boihood, www.bklynboihood.com/about-bbh.

Anti-Blackness, Degendering, and the Legacy of Slavery

The medical parameters of binary sexgender solidified in the first half of the twentieth century, as the medical industry grew in power. This only occurred in concert with the solidification of racial differentiation; the construction of race carried with it the construction of seemingly-commonsensical sexual differences. For example, pelvic size differentiation efforts constructed the “standard female-woman” and at the same time relied on “intra-racial” frames of reference for particular subgroups of women.⁹ This came at the direct expense — and torture — of Black subjects who defied sexgender normativity, many of whom were marked as “hermaphrodites”.¹⁰ Women were placed on the exoticized outskirts of female-womanhood, deemed physiologically (because/and thus) socially outside femininity.¹¹ Such a perception of priori non-normativity allowed some gender-creativity and camouflage, even as it functioned as a denial of humanity. If a person was deemed not person, but object, then gendered differentiation would lessen in significance, allowing a modicum of fugitive movement (as well as surprising access to some forms of transmedical intervention) for the already-degendered.¹²

This paradox can be further explored using works of Afro-pessimist scholarship, a complex tradition defined loosely as a “shared theoretical understanding of slavery, race, and the totality of anti-Blackness” despite internally-varied viewpoints.¹³ Rather than an ideology unto it-

⁹ Markowitz, Sally. "Pelvic Politics: Sexual Dimorphism and Racial Difference." *Queer Feminist Science Studies: A Reader*, edited by C Cipolla et al., University of Washington Press, 2017.

¹⁰ Gill-Peterson, Julian. “Trans of Color Critique before Transsexuality.” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2018, pp. 606–620., doi:10.1215/23289252-7090073.

¹¹ See Snorton, C. Riley. “Anatomically Speaking: Ungendered Flesh and the Science of Sex” *Black on Both Sides: a Racial History of Trans Identity*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

¹² Gill-Peterson, 2018.

¹³ “Introduction” *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction, Racked & Dispatched*, 2017.

self, Afro-pessimism serves as a “theoretical lens for situating relations of power, at the level of the political and the libidinal.”¹⁴ Orlando Patterson’s *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, a foundational text within the Afro-pessimist framework, concerns the production of the slave as a socially dead entity. Through a process called “natal alienation,” Patterson argues, enslaved people were not only stripped of familial ties, but also of the ability to “[belong] [...] to any legitimate social order,” and thus of human subjectivity.¹⁵ As such, the Black person is precluded from identification within human subcategories of identity and relationality, the “outsider” who constitutes the group within.¹⁶ The crossing of the Middle Passage *made* arelational, ungendered enslaved people, in which once-gendered subjectivities were “neither female nor male,” but fungible (exchangeable) units of cargo without personal or communal ties.¹⁷ ¹⁸ Without access to social gender (and, therefore, to legally-recognized marriage, bodily autonomy, the right to (be) parent (of) their own children, and more, all of which have long been predicated upon gender status, Black people are stripped of humanity under white supremacy.

Under these conditions, we see the ways in which gender functions as a proxy for and producer of “culturally intelligible” personhood/citizenship.¹⁹ If, as Saidiya Hartman describes, “[the] bounded bodily integrity of whiteness [is] secured by the abjection of others,” then the el-

¹⁴ “Introduction” Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction, Racked & Dispatched, 2017. p. 7.

¹⁵ Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death*. Harvard University Press, 1982. p. 5.

¹⁶ “Introduction” Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction, Racked & Dispatched, 2017. p. 10.

¹⁷ Hartman, Saidiya. “The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women’s Labors.” Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction, Racked & Dispatched, 2017. p. 83.

¹⁸ Snorton, 56-57.

¹⁹ Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. Routledge, 2009. p. 52-53.

ements that constitute Black “others” must be in some way unintelligible.²⁰ The individual human, gendered subject relies on the historical and ongoing subjection of Blackness to the realm of the “inhuman,” and in which degendering plays a key role.

*

I have been asked repeatedly by cis people, “if you don’t want to be called a man or a woman, *what do I even call you?*”

They are inevitably surprised when I suggest, “a person?”

*

In *Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe*, Hortense Spillers expanded on the concept of degendering as it was enacted to both literally and metaphorically destroy relational ties. The Middle Passage served as a means by which social gender was stripped or even killed. Humans were transformed into fungible commodities. Chiefly done in order to ensure the “natal alienation” Orlando Patterson discussed, Black women were turned from mothers (women) to sexed and engendered reproductive machines that ensured the continuation of slavery.²¹ White gender, and by extension, the white cisheteropatriarchal nuclear family concretized alongside and as a result.

White women were coherently categorized as feminine-female-women *at the same time as and because* Black women were simultaneously degendered and hypersexualized.²² Femininity itself was whiteness: the feminine duties of social and physiological reproduction are valorized in, demanded of, and allowed to white women, while women of color engaged in extra-

²⁰ Hartman, Saidiya. “The Burdened Individuality of Freedom.” *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction, Racked & Dispatched*, 2017. p. 47/

²¹ Spillers, 111.

²² Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta, and Combahee River Collective. “The Combahee River Collective Statement.” *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*, Haymarket Books, 2017.

domestic labor Black women were both deemed unwomen and marked as figures of sexual excess.²³ Writing of her existence at the “locus of cofounded identities,” Spillers recounts the dehumanizing names she has been given as a Black woman, marked as “‘Peaches’ and ‘Brown Sugar,’ ‘Sapphire’ and ‘Earth Mother,’ ‘Aunty,’ ‘Granny,’ God’s ‘Holy Fool,’ a ‘Miss Ebony First,’ or ‘Black Woman at the Podium’”²⁴. What if we theorized Spillers’ marked-(un)womanhood — in which every gender she has been called has been invented by the white supremacist state in service of its agenda — alongside (other) instances of misgendering? What if we, as Cathy Cohen suggests in *Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens*, moved “trans” from an identity limited to particular bodies, to a fluid and subjective experience? Indeed, what if we recognized the “welfare-queen” and other racialized, gender-defiant figures as queer in their own right?²⁵

This would require an expansion of *trans*, a genuine commitment to deessentialize “the trans experience.” There is no essentialized sexgender without racial essentialism, no naturalized cisness without its constituent whiteness. The entwinement of white supremacy, colonialism, misogyny, and cissexism are precisely what subjects women of color, especially Black women, to multilayered violences.²⁶ For this reason, even when cis and straight, Black women also have the ability to engage with and participate in an unequivocally queer, trans project, a movement designed to bend and break norms into which they themselves never fully fit. This is a project

²³ Snorton, 40.

²⁴ Spillers, 91.

²⁵ Cohen, 442.

²⁶ See the term *misogynoir*, coined by queer Black woman Moya Bailey, to describe the specific form of racialized misogyny directed at Black women as a racialized category, not simply as members of a shared political identity. The term was popularized by Trudy, the writer of now-inactive blog *Gradient Lair* (<https://www.gradientlair.com/post/84107309247/>), a blog critical to my early digital education from its establishment in 2012.

that extends far further than the work of “queer theory” — paradoxically confined by the white academy — typically permits.²⁷ Transness and Blackness are, as C. Riley Snorton wrote in *Black on Both Sides*, “tethered.”²⁸ To be Black and trans at once becomes overkill: ““You’re already black, why would you want to draw more attention to yourself?””²⁹ Widespread hatred toward, disgust at, and and criminalization of trans embodiment calls back to the criminalization of “already black” bodies, which Treva Ellison describes as “visually anchoring the production of LGBTQ criminality but [remaining] absent from the elaboration of LGBT politics.”³⁰

For Black transbitches, this results in, to use Frances M Beal’s term, a violent *double-jeopardy*, alienated from both white transness and ungendered Blackness, which involves alienation both from white transness and from Black cisness (XY31). Unlike their white counterparts, Black transbitches do not transition to a place of pronounced, unequivocal privilege; their masculinity is “impractical” in the face of “the acceptance of the inevitable death of Black masculinities by the state (read: white supremacy)” (XY215). Upon rejection from gender, and thus “cis-normative racial kinship,” Black transbitch subjects might feel fear and shame at the paradoxical validation I seek at the expense of my own gendered legibility. L. G. Parker comments that, transmasculinity aside, passing as a man is its own kind of “failure” because it leads both to the threat of white violence and to social rejection from the Black community (XY 130-131). The compounding marginalization of race and gender renders subjects vulnerable to transphobic violence by their only protection from white supremacy, and racist violence from those spaces

²⁷ Cohen, 439.

²⁸ Snorton, x.

²⁹ Warren, 402-406.

³⁰ Ellison, Treva Carrie. “Black Femme Praxis and the Promise of Black Gender.” *The Black Scholar*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2019, pp. 6–16., doi:10.1080/00064246.2019.1548055.

which claim trans-inclusiveness. Illegibility is not freedom, but a further barrier, a trap. Navigating sexgendered racialization becomes not only the pursuit of the elusive “trans enough” marker, but also the practice of managing gendered absences and excesses — it is not a simple question of being or not-being trans, but rather, what the narrative lens of transness *does*.

These issues make weighty, necessary demands of queerness and its potential as a politic and practice rather than an identity. To theorize a queerness and transness of human beings long denied the right to subjectivity requires a complication of what these words signify, a need exemplified by narrator Jazz Jordan’s refusal to fit both Black manhood and “what a woman of any race, culture, or ethnicity was defined as by society,” instead finding freedom in doing queerness outside of identity (XY305-306). In this vein, Alexander G. Weheliye expands the term “queer” ways reminiscent of both C. Riley Snorton and Cathy Cohen, using it “not exclusively as a designator for same-sex desires, acts, or identities but instead as a *shorthand for the interruption of the violence that attends to the enforcement of gender and sexual norms, especially as it pertains to blackness.*” [emphasis mine]³¹ This suggests that to look with a queer and trans, and ultimately reclamatory, lens upon Black ungendering poses the possibility of “vitiat[ing] the regime of gender” itself.³² Spaces between the letters of legible language open, allow for a crawlspace, and prefigure a future of political solidarity over individual identity that I dream of and that this thesis calls for.

Black queer and trans people are thus taking on the centuries-old burden of dehumanization and using it to evade legibility and surveillance. Instead, they push at, refuse, and reformu-

³¹ Weheliye, Alexander G. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Duke University Press, 2014 p. 97.

³² Bey, Marquis. “Black Fugitivity Un/Gendered.” *The Black Scholar*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2019, p. 56. doi: 10.1080/00064246.2019.1548059.

late the language of “queer” and “trans” themselves, demanding they become “self-determinative, opaque, and otherwise terms [...] giv[ing] primacy to an ever-capacious unfolding will to become something else.”³³ Both a space of being and of becoming, of imagining the future and manifesting it, fugitivity allows subjects to, as my classmate and now-Mount Holyoke Alum Natalie Lewis put it, “sit in the fire” rather than pick a side.³⁴ Perhaps it is in the fire around us that we might find who we are.

³³ Bey, 59.

³⁴ Pers. Communication on 10/7/19 in Senior Seminar, At Mount Holyoke College.

Two-Spirit & “The LGBTQ Family”

What is widely considered to be the "LGBTQ+ community" exists in the shadow of colonialism: america's “progress” toward acceptance exists in the wake of the destruction of Indigenous communities later named as queer. Erasure of language and culture through murder, rape, residential schools and forced conversion occurred alongside erasure of cultural identity and native languages. Gender and sexual terminology have long been imposed on indigenous communities in an active effort to destroy intra-community relationships, where the marker of “queer” was weaponized by missionaries and anthropologists to denote sexual and gendered peculiarity to be suppressed and ultimately eradicated.³⁵ Historicizing the use of widely-known gender and sexual terminologies reveals an uncomfortable truth about the nature of the "LGBTQ+ community” itself: that such differences would not and could not exist as such without being preceded by a sexgender binary as established through settler colonialism.

Despite discourses of and attempts at total destruction, Indigenous cultures across the continent persevered in the face of genocide, including religious and ideological indoctrination. Traditional articulations of gender were studied by anthropologists, who deployed offensive and dehumanizing terminology to what they deemed “primitive” queerness and similarly-“primitive” queer social acceptance.^{36 37} Though such terminology remained in circulation, increasing dissatisfaction with and refusal to rehabilitate colonialist language that did “not [reflect] gender roles,

³⁵ Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. “Indigenous Queer Normativity.” *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, University of Minnesota Press, 2017. pp. 124-125.

³⁶ Towle, Evan and Lynn M. Morgan. “Romancing the Transgender Native: Rethinking the Use of the 'Third Gender' Concept.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. vol. 8 no. 2, 2002. pp. 469–497. doi:10.1215/10642684-8-4-

³⁷ Ironically, this runs precisely counter to the contemporary homonationalist project, which condemns nations of the Global Southeast in particular as primitive for a perceived homo- and trans-phobic cultural pathology.

identities, and sexualities as lived by Native Americans,” demanded new language.³⁸ According to Qwo-Li Driskill, the demand for better terminology, under the auspices of "rhetorical sovereignty" (a peoples' right to determine their own language) began in earnest at a 1993 conference, after a presentation referred to those who would later be called "Two-Spirit" (2S) with one of these offensive, antiquated words, and a critical mass of people recognized the need for a new language.³⁹ Thus, 2S was born. It has since has come to function both as a community-maker, analogous in some ways to "queer" as a big-tent unifier across cultural traditions, and as a critique of gender/queerness itself.⁴⁰

Like "nonbinary," 2S in and of itself describes only the basic classificatory category an identity belongs or exists in relation to. The term can refer to gender and/or sexuality together or as a way of questioning the line between them. The decision to use this term specifically was likely grounded in the use of analogous gender-related language in Ojibwe, fusing linguistic revitalization with an effort to reclaim knowledge production from settlers. To some, the use of the term is an insufficient band-aid for centuries of cultural genocide, but to others, it opens a possibility to reconnect and remake severed cultural ties. It is also an assertion of self in the present day, a reminder that Indigenous peoples have not disappeared along with the racist terminology once used to mark their gendered embodiments. Indigenous cultures remain dynamic and fluid while still sharing 2S. This becomes apparent through a collective willingness to collaborate and work independently to reinvent gender in a way that allows both for 2S broadness and specific-

³⁸ Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang, quoted in Driskill, Qwo-Li. "Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1-2, 2010, p 72., doi: 10.1215/10642684-2009-013.

³⁹ Driskill, 72.

⁴⁰ Pyle, Kai. "Naming and Claiming: Recovering Ojibwe and Plains Cree Two-Spirit Language." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2018, pp. 574–588., doi:10.1215/23289252-7090045.

ty. Thus, it is an ambiguous unifier across culture and a rhetorical mode of solidarity-keeping with other gender non-conforming Indigenous people across spacetime, living and dead, while holding space for differences in individual identification.⁴¹⁴²

Unfortunately, increasing recognition of gender-nonconformity has also led to the appropriation of 2S ancestors' gender-crossing by majority-white trans communities, who hope to use their existence to reify nonbinariness. The very gender-crossers that settlers attempted to eradicate have been transformed into historical evidence of "primordial" transness that existed before its diagnostic conception.^{43 44} This is indicative of the extractivist place from which many white queer and trans people approach a newly-recognized "queer and trans history" of Indigeneity. As 2S narrator Fabian Romero writes in reference to white trans people: "[they] treat Indigenous people as if they are dead entities, only valuable of grave robbed references for depth" in attempting to prove transness as *trans-historical* (XY260). By invoking Indigenous people as "mythical gender warriors" in attempts to legitimize white transness, as argued by Towle and Morgan, white trans people reify the idea that non-white genders are inherently deviant (and that white genders are inherently normative) and simultaneously relegate Indigenous people to an unprogressive past.⁴⁵ Especially given widespread association between increased medical intervention and "progress," and the long-time usage of transmedical intervention as a marker of "true transness," Indigenous gender and sexual identities are framed as early versions of contemporary

⁴¹ Driskill, 73-74.

⁴² Pyle, 583-587.

⁴³ Pyle, 585.

⁴⁴ Driskill, 72-73.

⁴⁵ Towle and Morgan, 491.

colonial queernesses. Such perspectives tend to frame the LGBTQ+ community as an entity whose responsibility it is to “welcome in” 2S people as newcomers. A 2016 GLAAD article “Two-Spirits Among Us: celebrating LGBTQ Native American and First Nations Stories,” which aimed to demonstrate the importance of Indigenous narratives to “our [sic] LGBTQ family.”⁴⁶ This is a failure of both chronology and respect: Indigenous genders’ existence inarguably precedes any notion of “LGBTQ community” as such.

2S disrupts this framing of “LGBTQ community” as contemporary, progressive, and full of easily-categorizable identity groups. Instead, narrators use their 2S identities, communities, and practices to challenge pre-established LGBTQ categories. 2S in contemporary usage is purposefully ambiguous, vital, and ever-changing, disrupting the false perception of a “pure” and “untouched” pre-colonial culture, a perception informed by paternalism. Rather, 2S carves out a complex discursive space in which to express a plurality of Indigenous genders and/or sexualities, not only alongside but actually *against* the “LGBTQ” initialism it is said to precede. Narrator Redwolf Painter notes the insufficiency of colonial sexuality and gender terms in a discussion of “butch.” Wolf criticizes debates about trans/butch identities as based on “comparative statements of worth,” while Two-Spiritness allows difference without quantifying it.⁴⁷ Thus, Wolf does not simply “fit into” the LGBTQ initialism. Instead, butch is one somewhat-comfortable place within a hybrid whole that Wolf is still learning to navigate, while also navigating the relationship between whiteness and nativeness. fabian romero, who is 2S but, tellingly, “use[s] the words genderqueer and transgender” in unfamiliar situations, writes that genderqueer feels like a

⁴⁶ Bradford, Ray. Two-Spirits Among Us: Celebrating LGBTQ Native American and First Nations Stories. GLAAD, 6 Nov. 2016, www.glaad.org/blog/two-spirits-among-us-celebrating-lgbtq-native-american-and-first-nations-stories.

⁴⁷ Painter, Redwolf. “Split Myself Apart.” Coyote, Ivan E., and Zena Sharman, eds. Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012.

“veil [...] covering up this sacred [two-spirit] part of [them] that people assume is simple” (XY259-260). Two-spirit complicates individualistic, pathological transness, encompassing the breaking of not only colonial, but also familial sexgender expectations. It can be a chosen belief system, rather than a quantifiable, fixed, inborn state of being — at odds with hegemonic transness in form and in function (XY258-259).

Thus, 2S identity can cross and complicate normative understandings of queer and trans life, due precisely to its *a priori* exclusion from and illegibility to the realm of hegemonic white transness. It has the ability to connect people across spacetime, using generations of variously-identified, diverse peoples and traditions to compose a collective historical narrative of what they call “trans*temporal kinship.” In taking such an approach, Kai Pyle also notes that the very concept of dictionary-defined terminology was imposed by white missionaries, who sought to destroy all living evidence of tribal life and instead relegate Indigenous peoples to the pages of their history books.⁴⁸ This was particularly true for sexgender, for which communities oftentimes had a wide variety of ever-shifting terms whose intricacies are not parseable to the unfamiliar.⁴⁹ Because many Indigenous people today lack access to the sexgender traditions of their respective tribes — whether as a result of erasure, assimilation, community cisheterosexism, or all three — 2S is a step toward connection made with awareness of all that remains unknown. It aids people in “creat[ing] [their] own history” out of a wide array of stories, definitions, and experiences while never forgetting where and who they came from.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Pyle, 578.

⁴⁹ Pyle, 583.

⁵⁰ Painter, 2012.

Pyle is among those who undertake terminological adoption and recovery as a political project, and understand their mode of identification as part of a cultural lineage. Not only does their two-spirit identity declare their love for and responsibility to their ancestors, while also acknowledging that, as new generations make new meanings for gender, terminologies will also inherit new meanings and arenas of significance. They call on other 2S people to “think in both directions,” in order to “form communities across time;” aided, ironically, by the very word that also reflects a degree of cultural erasure.⁵¹ The word Two-Spirit is itself a critique, both of historical violence and of continued erasure of Indigenous gender under the broad category of *trans*.⁵² It poses the possibility of a transness outside the narrative bounds of trans subjects, one based on ideology, commitment, and community. In the face of transmedical domination, 2S provides a necessary escape route.

⁵¹ Pyle, 586.

⁵² Towle and Morgan, 72.

Anzaldúa's Borderlands, "An Unmapped Common Ground"⁵³

"Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement," say the members of my race.

"Your allegiance is to the third world," say my Black and Asian friends. "Your allegiance is to your gender, to women," say the feminists. Then there's my allegiance to the gay movement, to the socialist revolution, to the new Age, to magic and the occult. And there's my affinity to literature, to the world of the artist. What am I? A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mythic leanings.... Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me.

—Gloria E. Anzaldúa.⁵⁴

In their 1998 work, *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam uses the term "border wars" to describe conflicts between trans men and butch lesbians over the rocky terrain of body-modification, "ownership" of dysphoria as a diagnosis-concept, and ownership of marginal masculinity itself. Halberstam argues for an often-fuzzy, shifting, and most of all, temporally-contingent "line" between trans and butch bodies, in conversation with trans man scholar Jay Prosser, a believer in more concrete, ontological differences between the "trans" and "butch" subjects.⁵⁵ Though inarguably valuable to transbitches writ large and also for this paper, the collapsing of these discourses under the heading "border wars," is unwise and insulting to those targeted by

⁵³ Keating, AnaLouise. "From Borderlands and New Mestizas to Nepantlas and Nepantleras: Anzaldúan Theories for Social Change." *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2006, p 10.

⁵⁴ Anzaldúa, Gloria. "La Prieta." *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Moraga Cherríe and Anzaldúa Gloria, State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 2015. pp. 98-209.

⁵⁵ Halberstam, J. *Female Masculinity*. Duke University Press, 1998.

literal border wars, as well as the wars between marginalizes whose communities are hostile to each other.

Both more immediate and more fatal than the overwhelming majority of [white, citizen] trans(/)butch concerns, the struggles of Chicana queer and trans people encompass lived and theorized racial, ethnic, transnational, gender, sexual, borders, often at the same time. “Not everyone is transitioning to be a white man,” and uncritical references only to trans(/)butch conflict obfuscates the role of race in the invention and reification of sexgendered barriers (XY245). The fights over transition as a movement toward unequivocal privilege is, too, challenged by the threat of violence conferred by movement into racialized masculinity. Feelings of dis-belonging, refusal of co-identification, and experiences of exclusion concern far more than just gender/sexual crossing and alienation, but rather of the compounding, interlocking experiences at the nexus of racial, geographic, gender, sexual, and other oppressions.

Given multilayered intersections of identities too often presumed contradictory, racialized queer and transness can feel far more like a disavowal of community and familial ties (as well as a bodily risk) than an act of liberation. While debates rage over how trans is “too” (true) trans to sit at the butch table, or which trans men can or should claim a butchness perceived to be no longer “theirs”, the possibility of cultural rejection poses an immense threat to trans(/)butches of color, and QTPoC at large. This is especially true given “correct” genderqueerness’s default presentation as white and adherent to euro-american standards of “androgyny,” and the resulting expulsion of alternative transnesses from communities on the basis of *untruthness*.⁵⁶ There emerges the impossible choice between one’s culture and gender/sexual identity, between experiencing

⁵⁶ Cuevas, T. Jackie. *Post-Borderlandia: Chicana Literature and Gender Variant Critique*. Rutgers University Press, 2018. p. 82-83.

homo-/trans- phobias and racism. It is here that we find Gloria Anzaldúa, author of seminal transnarrative *Borderlands / La Frontera*, in which she explores not an individual trans subjectivity but a multimodal self at the intersection of Chicana, lesbian, working-class, and other identities.

In addressing Gloria Anzaldúa's "transfrontera, transdisciplinary text,"⁵⁷ *Borderlands / La Frontera*, I refuse to restrict transbutch discourse to Jack Halberstam and Jay Prosser's metaphorization of the "borderlands," which presumes that racialized, undocumented, poor, and other subjects directly impacted by literal, national border wars are never involved in the figurative wars between trans and butch.⁵⁸ Such assertions are no more than a rehash of the colonial, white supremacist gender norms I introduced in the preceding sections, in which white genders — including non-normative ones — are the benchmark against which all others are measured, usually rendering the gender experiences of racially and geographically marginalized people unimportant or even inauthentically-trans.⁵⁹ Are there no subjects whose experience and theorization cover borders material and discursive alike; gender mobility across land and language? Must we sacrifice trans-national borders to attend to sexual and gendered wars, or sacrifice hybrid sexgendered selves in order to speak honestly and complicatedly about race and migration?

I myself at first ignored the potentialities of transnarrative outside the realms of individualized, self-identified trans(/)butchnessness. However, the very evasions, defiances, and uncertainties that first led me to overlook Anzaldúa are precisely those things that make her writing transbutch. It crosses between "theory" and "memoir". It remains an open project, even more

⁵⁷ Sonia Saldívar-Hull, quoted in Keating, 7.

⁵⁸ Halberstam, 173.

⁵⁹ See Binaohan, B. *Decolonizing Trans/Gender* 101. Biyuti Publishing, 2014.

open, according to Anzaldúa, than its many-disciplined readers assume.⁶⁰ At the same time, elements of *Borderlands* bear striking similarities to transbutch narrative conventions: home-leaving and home-rejection; of loyalty and (chosen) family; even embodiment itself as always-already criminal. In a poignant reflection of her concept of nos/otras, we will see Anzaldúa *cross into* transbutch narrative by revealing not the samenesses between her narrative and the others, but shared difference.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Keating, 8 .

⁶¹ Keating, 9-10.

Borderlands / La Frontera: Queer & Mestiza

Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) classic *Borderlands / La Frontera* addresses not only the geographical border between the u.s. and Mexico, but internal, embodied, borders of gender. Anzaldúa narrates her own coming-of-age as a mestiza, a queer person, a *half-and-half*. This embodiment allows her to be both all — universal, a connector across differences — and, sometimes, nothing, without a home. She shares in both a chosen (in the case of queerness) and inherited (in the case of her Chicana identity) experience of mixedness, wherein her existence is one of “crossing over, or go[ing] through the confines of the ‘normal’” (B3). Not only this, but crossing is the stuff her existence consists of: she forms insights, collects consciousness, by “kicking a hole out of the old boundaries of the self and slipping under or over, dragging the old skin along, stumbling over it” (B49).

Anzaldúa argues that, as a mestiza, she is always-already multiple, living in a state of “psychic restlessness” and even “perpetual transition” (B78). In fact, gender-defiance is a recurring theme in *Borderlands*, especially during an early scene depicting a semi-mythic shapeshifter she knew as a child: a representation of the power of being “both” male and female. While not specifically identifying the personal queerness of the figure she invokes, she places the shapeshifter in conversation with queerness, as she cites the special access queer people have to many gendered energies simultaneously: effectively arguing for a *non-binary* queerness in its most literal sense. Perhaps, even, she is arguing for an *anti-* or *ante-*binary queerness: one that reaches toward a modified, pre-colonial understanding of gender in order to inform post- and anti-colonial possibility. Sexgender becomes another border to be crossed and ultimately abolished in the battle against colonial violence.

Just like the simultaneous power and oppression of the “maimed, mad, and sexually different” body, by turns stigmatized and revered by communities, so too is Anzaldúa’s relationship to all cultures she walks through a radical and radically-vulnerable one (B19). She locates her capacity to heal gendered and cultural divides to her mestiza approach to language, which germinated in an environment of identity-denial (B74). She was denied even the word to think herself a woman among only other women (*nosotras*), and denied her (accented) voice as a Chicana (which I am auto-suggested by this document to correct to “Chicano”) child, and whose hybrid home-language is marked “illegitimate” by English and Spanish speakers alike (B54-57). When speaking so-called proper English, Anzaldúa is afraid both to be marked an illegitimate, *assimilated* Chicana. On any side of the border, she remains an Other, carrying the shadow of otherness with and as her border-body. Her triple-alienation makes her both homeless and especially capable of establishing multiple homes in multiple cultures (B84). Where there is no fixed self, no fixed identity, there is both great possibility and great precarity.

Anzaldúa’s ideology and practice of crossing also fundamentally impacts her views of womanhood and lesbianism. She is aware that, by virtue of her very existence, she carries an inevitable Otherness into queer spaces, Chicano spaces, and women’s spaces (because she is all and more at once) — this stops her from being able to view lesbian-womanhood in the insular way of her separatist contemporaries. Rather than an inherent and uncrossable divide, manhood and womanhood are separated by learned power differentials that also possess the capacity to be crossed — unlearned (84). Hostile masculinities, including machismo, are thus each *culturally situated* rather than universal, simple, and inevitably contagious. Like her shapeshifter character who has a penis for six months a year and a vagina the other six, Anzaldúa uses writing to empa-

thetically cross gender lines in a way she (as a result of patriarchy) is unable to do in physical space. She is able, by writing herself, a “precocious girl-child forced to grow up too quickly,” into existence, releasing that girl in the form of a book and letting her *become* (B66).

Anzaldúa's Trans-Narrativization

Anzaldúa's narrative is unique in its cyclicity, non-use of words like "transgender" or "dysphoria," and likely-purposeful refusal to engage with medico-legal status shifts. Her arguments are animated with the invocation of mystical images such as the serpent, itself an echo of her cyclical approach to time. This, too, is unique. However, many aspects of Anzaldúa's composite story foreshadow the trans narrative conventions of later stories. First and foremost, girlhood — coming of age with/in and against it — takes center stage, and though not identified as a "tomboy," Anzaldúa knows herself not to be a *normal* girl at a young age. As she navigates (trans-genre) between poetry, prose, and theory, she invokes particular ages and memories when appropriate as illustration or evidence. In doing so, she also challenges white american scholarly tradition, locating her knowledge in her body and lived experiences, supplied by the memories she narrates.

She begins at an end of sorts, placing herself as the latest in a line of women, as part of a cultural and familial lineage: her narrative is not only her own, but takes on a historical and relational component. This means that her gender-sexual crossing is also a cultural crossing. Although the "fear of going home" is common to the narratives of my white narrators, too, when home is already marginalized by large swaths of one's chosen community, the fear is complicated (B20). Even while she feels "perfectly free" to criticize her culture, she also carries its mark with her in (white) queer space: her narrative beginning with her cultural lineage performs the function that her racialization performs in everyday life, situating her queerness as always in reference to her color, culture, and history. Her radical crossing becomes legible in relation to others' expectations and her subversion of them.

The first example of gender subversion she uses is her perceived “laziness” as a child, referring to her refusal to do an amount of chores never expected from her brothers (B16-17). This is a common method of introducing trans-possible childhoods, functioning both to mark an early act of crossing and to provide evidence of one’s “inherent” nonconformity. Oftentimes, including with Anzaldúa, early nonconformity is reflected upon retroactively by adult writers, only able to see the implications of treatment and behavior in hindsight. As a toddler, she was visited by the Coatlicue, an archetype of literal non-binariness: duality, synthesis, and an ultimate whole greater than the sum of its parts (B46). A visit from the Coatlicue is a “prelude to crossing,” a signal of simultaneous belonging and alienation (B48). It reveals the shadow of the Other located in queers, mestizas, and other border-crossers, the way in which we carry the mark of the Other (the “Shadow Beast” haunting insular identity-spaces) no matter where we find a modicum of home) (B17).

This alienation Anzaldúa felt at two or three, she felt again acutely when she got her first period. She writes that it distanced her from others, trapped her in her body (B43). It revealed that she bore the mark of abnormality: rather than placing her as a woman among other women, Anzaldúa’s period served to highlight her difference. Alien, she felt deformed and evil among the normal. More than that, she felt abnormal and evil without a name to call it. She writes her namelessness in verse (B43):

She has this fear	that she has no names	that she
has many names	that she doesn't know her names	She has this

fear

that she's an image

that comes and goes

Alienation and estrangement are signified by namelessness: you are a stranger when no one knows what to call you. You are without story or script. You are hybrid when there are too many things to call you, when you have too many names to know what to call yourself. By being one of all, crossers risk being one of none. To be all and to be none, both symbolizable by 0, by a circle whose inside and outside remain unspecified, is a dangerous place to be. Anzaldúa's narrative is as much a means of grasping for identity as an assertion of multiplicity.

Later, she jumps from a retelling of the past to a telling of the present, of her identity as a writer to be a shapeshifting and even shamanic one (B66). Her writing process is one of continuous transition; she transitions by birthing herself into existence, particularly through trance-like "awakened dreams" she describes as including "thought shifts, reality shifts, [and] gender shifts" (B70; 73). Her transitional process is not gender-exclusive, but gender change becomes part of a wider shift in content and style of thought. Rather than *entering* the borderlands through shifts in thought, she instead is able to come to terms with her place amidst them, amidst a dense overgrowth of class and race and gender and geography and ability and sexuality and more.

Her narrative does not begin and end, it snaps up sections of her life and reveals the shapeshifting potential the writing process contains. Anzaldúa can become anything, anyone, and tell her story in any way she chooses: if this text is her body, she is all its contents at once. As in transbutchness, the transness of her narrative is in its process: the *crossing* itself more important than the gender begun and ended with.

Transness and Mestiza Consciousness

Anzaldúa most explicitly acknowledges the transness of her own narrative when describing her mestiza embodiment: “a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, [and] an inner war,” rendering her body a battlefield upon which cultural, gendered, and sexual conflicts re-enact themselves (B78). Being Chicana has for her been an experience of choosing some words and some names at the expense of others, of fighting linguistic border wars on the very embodied terrain on which geographic was have played out.

Depending on who she is talking to, constantly having to pinpoint her liminal identity, as if any thing can be fully described unless it’s static: unless it’s dead. Any expressible version of herself will be somehow incomplete; any complete version of herself will not be universally expressible; the vitality of her capacity as a trans theorist is the result of a realization and acceptance of this truth. Her text asks: is she “Hispanic, Latin, Latin American, Chicano, Mexicano, American, Mexican American, or something else” (B62)? It depends on who’s talking and who’s listening. The same applies to her relationship to sexuality, gender, and crossing.

Anzaldúa’s conception of transition and of crossing is thus larger in scope than popular trans terminologies are able to encapsulate — there is more work to be done, more transing to be contended with. She addresses a multi-faceted need for linguistic crossing in her relationship with the term “lesbian,” even as she regularly uses it to place herself among others. The word “lesbian,” and its singular implication of “[white] woman-loving-woman” do not address her reality as a “working-class Chicana, mestizo — a composite being.”⁶² In this case, she uses her Chicana, mestiza, and working-class identities as figurative “transings” to what would otherwise

⁶² Cuevas, 30.

be simply called “lesbianism” — they are being in relation to lesbianism while transcending its received definition. This transing is, ironically, as invisible to mainstream conceptions of what “trans” is as they are to those for whom lesbianism is a single most salient identity practice — and a vital, oft-overlooked form of transbutchness, where concerns often take on a gender/sexual myopia.

An antidote to myopia of all kinds, and a tool toward surviving and thriving in a border-body, Anzaldúa creates the term “mestiza consciousness.” She defines mestiza consciousness not by what it is, but instead by what it *does*: it is “how duality is transcended [...] the answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females [...] healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts” (B80). She refuses single-occupancy and static identities, and in doing so refuses conceptions of identity as a place to sit inside at all. Rather, if any identity, Anzaldúa takes up identity as a purpose: she is a mestiza because of her willingness to put that mestizahood to work, to blend, transform, and heal across barriers in a way specific to her subject position. This work requires identificatory transcendence; self-restriction to one label — lesbian, Chicana, working-class, and even “trans” — would not only limit her purpose but actively stop her from doing it. With mestiza consciousness, she cites and then moves beyond lesbianism; she invokes but need not identify-within transness, because the transness is an ongoing action.

“Neither eagle nor serpent,” Anzaldúa exemplifies the transbutch possibility of identity as a vehicle across and beyond borders. Her terms, including “mestiza consciousness,” provide a roadmap where pre-made terms fail. She refuses both identification and counter-identification with her marginalization, knowing that even counter-identification reifies the existence of an op-

pressive force. This suggests the existence of an *opposition* between two unrelated forces rather than a *fissure* between two pieces with unificatory potential, the very opposite of the narrative. The border body is one on whom this fissure, this war is mapped, and Anzaldúa responds with purposeful ambiguity instead of passive ambivalence — an active agent in her own transit(ion) from place to place (B78-79). She claims an identity that is even greater than the sum of “the white parts, the male parts, the pathological parts, the queer parts, the vulnerable parts,” (B88). The way grounded in mestiza consciousness, she argues, is the way that makes room while at the same time revealing the room’s walls a mirage.

Anzaldúa’s approach to identity is crucial to understanding my later proposal for a trans-butcht way of relating, identifying, and organizing. This is an approach grounded in experiences of geographical and metaphoric migration, an identificatory “home” tied to movement, not static location, and certainly not at the expense of Others. Perhaps the greatest weakness I’ve seen in predominantly-white trans(/)butcht discourses is the belief that discourse on identity and belonging must end in resolution. The result of a prior sense of unmarked racial belonging, often without prior experience of identificatory liminality and contradiction, white queer and trans people are quick to presume a “border war” — a term whose full implications are routinely ignored — where there is in reality just tension. Such communities are quick to exclude those whose genres of queerness and transness are not nameable as such, including Anzaldúa’s, and Anzaldúa is both representative of and practiced at opening space for transbutcht narratives beyond their trans (or) butcht referents. Transbutcht parallel to (though distinct from and, potentially, overlapping with) can be the path to a whole greater than and different from the sum of its parts.

What do we gain from reading gender migration in “non-transgender” works, rather than restricting it to the realm of explicitly-transgender (usually white) stories? It draws attention to the insufficiency of western medical science as a gender-navigator; calls into question whether or not the vision of “transness” the medical industry advances is “trans” (on the move) at all. It reveals the restrictiveness of trans-as-internal-pathology, especially given its connection to English language hegemony (“‘lesbian’ doesn't name anything in my homeland”) and white supremacist, colonial conceptions of gender and its others. Transness travels, Anzaldúa argues, far beyond the walls of the clinic: across place, culture, language, and more; a crossing, even, of genres like academic, poetic, and narrative writing. Her practiced, conscious refusal of narrative, ideological, and (thus) gendered cisness, are critical to the transbutchness I imagine, particularly in the wake of increasing institutional and discursive containment.

TRANSMEDICINE: A DIAGNOSTIC (HI)STORY

I was diagnosed with gender dysphoria (GD) in 2017, one month after my eighteenth birthday. I said to the professionals that it began around age seven, when I first noticed my chest, layering tank tops beneath my shirts in order to flatten the growing breasts that I perceived. “And so I’ve felt dysphoric about — about the breasts (*not mine, never mine*) — for a while now,” I said, describing an excruciating puberty, entrance into an increasingly-un survivable body. I felt hot whenever I described times like these, and would stare at some undefined place on the wall above my therapist’s shoulder. All this talk of dysphoria, this approximation of the feelings for which there are likely no accurate words, made me feel feverish. I felt small behind this nameless wall, behind this suspect self I was to speak for. I spoke the truth they wanted to hear, concealed the things they didn’t.

Yes, ever since I was a child.

Yes, this will cure me of my body; my feelings on it.

Yes, I was surely born in the wrong one.

I was seven the first time I experienced something that might be called “dysphoria” — either seeing or believing I saw breasts and layering tank tops beneath my shirt to tame them. This, as well as panic upon realizing others could see the sports-bra-like imprint of my tank tops beneath my shirts, were commonplace. This continued consistently, growing exponentially with puberty. My first period was an unqualified disaster, continued to be for subsequent months. When — via the

internet — I realized I did not have to become a woman simply because I had been a girl, I defected, beginning what I will come to call a *transition to nothing*.

Growing up, though, I was a girl. I was not a “nothing” with a birth defect, and take issue with the way so-called “birth defects” of any kind are framed by medicine. Regardless, my body-hatred was only tangentially connected to my gender. I wasn’t a tomboy, neither wanted to be nor considered myself a boy. If I had been asked, I would certainly not have admitted to this, nor to my multiple “comorbid” diagnoses that would likely have called suspicion not only on my transness but my sanity, my capacity to control my body at all. Yes, it’s true, I’ve always felt *different*. But I wasn’t always trans, nor was I born this way. I simply know better than to disclose this fact to the people in charge of my uterus and chest. I got away with this game, too, because I was “lucky”: living in Western Massachusetts has allowed me to access trans-affirming care I would not have had otherwise; with professionals who support me in my gender non-conformity even while they require a degree of narrative conformance. Still, my usage of digital trans resources was something I could only reveal limitedly and carefully (so as not to suggest that “the internet made me trans”). Like any actor, it was necessary to appear as though I had memorized no lines at all, make my delivery appear effortless. Being trans, being a transbutch, is about telling a story.

Below, I include a sample of the narrative to which I had to conform, a narrative that is no less a story than the one I am telling now, but which is accepted as objective, medical truth by virtue of the power relations behind it. In order to receive my mastectomy — my “male chest”— I first had to present gender dysphoria, meeting

ALL the following indications:

- The desire to live and be accepted as a member of another gender other than one's assigned sex, typically accompanied by the desire to make the physical body as congruent as possible with the identified gender through surgery and hormone treatment.
- The new gender identity has been present for at least 12 months.
- The member has a consistent, stable gender identity that is well documented by their treating providers, and when possible, lives as their affirmed gender in places where it is safe to do so.
- The gender dysphoria (ICD-10 codes F64.0-F64.9 gender identity disorder) is not a symptom of another mental disorder.¹

I needed to convince those observing me that I was in the incorrect body, or that I was a person of another gender experiencing a mere birth defect, a mistake. There was a truth living inside of me that could not be drawn-out without surgery; a true gender stifled by an unwanted chest. Transmedical intervention was to be both necessary and sufficient in getting me toward my internal "truth," a truth toward which I was moving consistently and linearly; one that would render all my other identities and experiences mere mistakes. This narrative has been more than half a century in the making, and was first curated under the auspices of the medical industry itself. Today, in a softened form, this pathologization remains, and the colloquial descriptor we use to describe our feelings of discomfort and alienation — "dysphoria" — also constitute the diagnostic label we must receive to be permitted transmedical recognition — and access to the proce-

¹ Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. Medical Policy: Gender Affirming Services (Transgender Services). Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, 2020.

dures framed as “cure”. It perpetuates the same logics have underlined transmedical intervention since its initial inclusion in the DSM as “transsexualism.”

Today, the DSM calls us gender dysphoric. The ICD, published by the World Health Organization, replies, “gender incongruence” (recently changed from the previous term, “transsexualism”²). Both stress that the conditions are not a pathologization of transness itself, but rather of an insalubrious symptomology associated with transness: a disconnect between one’s embodied reality, their self-perception, and their body-desires.³ To these institutions, even while the mere act of gender-crossing is no longer formally pathologized, such disconnect — such body-hate — is. Without such a diagnosis, the trans patient (absent considerable disposable wealth) has no way to obtain the body they want and need. Again, such framing places transness as a sickness to cure, one’s pre-transition life as a misfortune to overcome. Gender-crossing is straightened, that is, turned linear; GD turns a complex interplay of social, cultural, and physiological influences on bodymind relation and collapses them into a sickness to be treated and cured, in this case through transition — this is not the case because doctors want *more* people to transition, but the opposite. Rather, diagnosis enables the medical management of gender non-conformity and erases the impacts of structural cissexism, heterosexism, and patriarchy in the face of “in-born pathology.”

² “WHO/Europe Brief – Transgender Health in the Context of ICD-11.” World Health Organization, World Health Organization, www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/gender/gender-definitions/who-europe-brief-transgender-health-in-the-context-of-icd-11.

³ Rodríguez, María Fernández, et al. “Gender Incongruence Is No Longer a Mental Disorder.” *Journal Of Mental Health And Clinical Psychology*, vol. 2, no. 5, 2018, pp. 6–8., doi:10.29245/2578-2959/2018/5.1157.

Narrativising Transmedicalism

There exist trans people — transmedicalists — who agree with the doctors, believing their transness (or, more specifically, their dysphoria) to be a curable condition. Transmedicalism refers to the belief that there exist some “real” transgender people and some “fake” transgender people, and the “real” subgroup is necessarily represented by those who go through with so-called complete biomedical transition. Along with this, it demands a “social transition,” whose distinction from “medical transition” is often unclear (is the decision to grow a beard medical, or social?). Social transition almost always involves a public, ultimately legal name-and sex(gender) marker change on one’s identification; a total forsaking of the prior wardrobe and hairstyle; and even the erasure of one’s “pretransition” life (curiously, Mario Martino does not do this, instead opting to include a collection of pretransition photos in the 1979 edition of *Emergence*). All of these changes and rejections are deemed necessary and sufficient to demonstrate what should, ostensibly, have been already true: that a trans subject is a [] trapped in a [] body. Such a collection of beliefs is understood as “transnormativity,” defined as

[T]he ways in which dominant narratives about what it means to be transgender emphasize a particular and narrow set of tropes to which all transgender people are expected to adhere. These include expectations that 1) all transgender people conform to a “wrong body narrative” when describing their gender (Latham, 2019), 2) all transgender people require medical treatment, and 3) all transgender people should seek to present and be perceived as cisgender (Riggs, DW, Pearce, R, Pfeffer, CA et al., 2019).

I use transnormativity, here, not as a direct analogue to homonormativity, but rather as a signpost for a particular set of transmedicalist narratives, glorifying transition as a (re)turn toward the inner, normative self. Its practitioners take pains to dissociate themselves from their queer, non-passing, and otherwise-embarrassing⁴ counterparts). They understand transness to be a pathology specific to a select few “truly-dysphoric” people (despite the opacity of “dysphoria” as a signifier), the rest are deemed at best, misguided and at worst, delusional “transtrenders” worthy of scorn⁵. Some transmedicalists even identify as cis post-transition, aiming not only to cross gender but to do so without a trace, to release the past trans-diagnosis as if to mark themselves recovered (UB292). Their goal in transitioning is not to disrupt expectations, but to vanish their heretofore disruptive genders: they transition to *remove* their transess. In aiding the most privileged trans people in gaining an image of uprightness and decency separate from queers, transmedical transnormativity weaponizes sexgender-crossing to reify the gender binary, without which no crossing would be necessary.

Transmedicalism places emphasis on “physical dysphoria” as necessary and sufficient to warrant a “trans diagnosis.” Insufficient physical dysphoria (even if one experiences what is termed “social dysphoria,” that is, negative feelings and/or self-hatred upon being misgendered, wearing clothing that does not match their gender, and facing various other forms of micro- and macro-aggression) marks one as not trans, and all who claim transness without “physical dysphoria” are deemed *fakes*. Although the legitimacy of one’s transness is said to be predicated on

⁴ See Theo Hendrie’s critique/parody of these discourses: Hendrie, Theo. 2019, Jan. 30. *I’m Faking Being Trans (Transtrender Test)* [video file] Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBCPDFxNAnQ>.

⁵ See Fisher, Jessica. “Transgender Digital Embodiments: Questions of the Transgender Body in the 21st Century.” Kennesaw State University, 2019, digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/mast_etd/24/ and Phineasfrogg. Some thoughts on the ‘Truscum’ v ‘Tucute’ debate October 13, 2014. <https://phineasfrogg.tumblr.com/post/99960248469/>.

“physical [‘real’] dysphoria,” there are wide-ranging social components that can either legitimize or disqualify one as trans according to the general beliefs of transmedicalism. Thus, we see the mutual-constitution of “sexgender,” as well as the central paradox of transmedical ideology: one must “socially transition” in order to prove oneself “trans enough,” but simultaneously always-already have experienced transness as a biological condition.

Even as one must go through a series of complicated, bureaucratic dances to be truly trans, one must have always-already been trans in order to qualify. Narrators often attempt to resolve that founding contraction of transmedical, “born-this-way” rhetoric by citing childhood tomboyishness, drawing a narrative throughline from early childhood behavior to the decision to transition, oftentimes catalyzed by puberty. Here is the prototypical trans man (from whose narrative the transmasculine gold-standard is set), who as a child ran shirtless, played sports, was close friends with other boys, and balked at the thought of wearing a dress. Mario Martino opens *Emergence* with “[t]ll I was nine, I didn’t know I wasn’t a boy” (E, Preface). Royce Hall, a trans man writer in *Outside the XY*, echoes this in a poem (XY162):

I was four years old
 The first time I attempted to stand up and urinate
 Imagine clutching your pubic region
 In your tiny hands hoping it will transform into a penis

Stories that uphold transmedicalism rely on citing these early-childhood events, prior to knowing what transness even was, citing an “innocence” and “naturalness” to subjects’ gender self-knowledge. Childhood gender-defiance is flattened and organized into an understandable,

somewhat tyrannical narrative that can easily be circulated and identified. This is the narrative of the tomboy, who aspires to, and often succeeds in, passing as a boy (or into the activities of boyhood) despite assigned sexgender; such narratives are by no means universal, but have become cliched in transbutch coming-of-age-stories. In addition to precluding non-tomboy transbutches from claiming culturally-identifiable transbutch childhoods, it also transforms a mode of gender-resistance (transness) into a sort of inevitability, the natural progression of the tomboy left unaltered.

Mario Martino, having felt like a boy from early childhood, writes along these lines: while his transition is an immense change, it is the inevitable result of his embodiment and his collection of experiences. He paints transition as a dramatic life-upheaval, a disruption rather than an expansion of his experience, painting cisgender manhood as an aspiration to which he, from his prior “wrong body” must aspire, and ultimately become. This actually reifies cis wo/manhood: Martino is only permitted to change his “sex marker” to male after having a hysterectomy and oophorectomy (E189). The sexgendering system (in which a doctor permanently decides the social position of an infant by a glance at their external genitalia) into which we were all forced is thus deemed redeemable, usually-correct but for some medically-correctable defect(or)s. In essence, the transmedicalist view is the view that you, as a trans person, are a mistake only a doctor can fix and normalize. Martino reinscribes the idea that *real* trans men must want “bottom surgery,” (which a true trans person has either had or “not had yet”) (PM129). The perceived-necessity of bottom surgery for true transness reinforces the conditions that produced the dysphoric subject in the first place. Martino does not explicitly declare himself “truly trans” until validated in this way, even though he “should always have been” a man (E146). Then again,

by relying exclusively on the construct of medical dysphoria to explain transness, Martino and those like him actually erase the daily violence enacted by gender while also struggling (and even writing memoirs about) navigating it. In terms of hormones, trans people become “patient[s] until [we] die,” able to be medically surveilled for as long as hormone replacement therapy (HRT) (E146). As “therapy,” the hormones, too, become a treatment for a diseased bodymind, with medical professionals as the exclusive purveyors of dysphoria-relief.

Before any of this, though, is the psychiatric evaluation, not only to determine the legitimacy of one’s gender but to confirm their sanity. Transmedicalists often take pains to distinguish themselves from “deluded” *fake trans people*. Martino declares upon being psychiatrically evaluated, “[the psychiatrist] validated that [he] was a *legitimate patient*: not a homosexual, transvestite, schizoid, psychopath, or exhibitionist” (E145) (emphasis mine). In a parallel between cis legitimization at trans peoples’ expense, Martino’s medical legitimization comes at the expense of “fake trans people,” including those who possess the supposedly-undesirable traits he lists above. Although many transition-restrictions Martino lists have softened or disappeared since the 1970s, this restriction remains a frequent disqualifier and frightening specter for those who seek transition. I lied to multiple medical professionals in the process of seeking surgery, knowing that to reveal this to them could bar me from surgery forever. The ideal gender is the sane-gender, and to qualify for true-transness, one is to move into a gender in which they can be saner than the one they were born into. Martino could not be a psychologically healthy woman, but in becoming a man, could san(e)itize himself by “curing” his dysphoria.

As someone also in the medical profession (Martino is a nurse) Martino uses his narrative not only as a means of storytelling but as a guide or plea: “I cannot stress too often,” he writes,

“the point that no patient should be permitted sex change until [medical] evaluation is completed and approved,” at the time only possible after one year of hormones and “role-play” (E212). For a year, he was required to “play the role” of a (cisheteronormative) man in terms of “speech patterns and inflections, mannerisms, carriage, and gait” (E146). Speaking approvingly not only of these requirements but of those who perform them properly, Martino pays particular attention to the trans women he encounters in his interactions with medicine. In a telling confirmation of these women's social positions *as women*, Martino delegitimizes their identities by pointing to their “inappropriate” (even “shrill”) emotional and sexual behavior (209). Again, he defines himself explicitly against “this segment of transsexualism” in order to prove his transmedical legitimacy (210). As with the transmedical narrative writ large, its retelling functions as confirmation (I first wrote “conformation”) of its own legitimacy. Rather than experiencing transness as a site of break from cisness, it is instead an effort to return to a normalcy heretofore denied, yet longed for forever. Here is a transness that somehow asserts cisness as aspirational, that invents itself as inferior. Yet, this is what some of us must do to survive: these are the discourses all of us who engage with medico-psychiatric transness must reckon with.

*

When I was asked *when I would change my name* I did not say *never* but *I haven't chosen yet*. When I was misgendered — both as a *he* and as a *she* — both to my face and in earshot at my top surgery consultation, I said nothing. I did not cry in front of any doctor, nurse, therapist, or psychiatrist involved, even though I often wanted to (a noble attempt at correct masculine behavior?). I made no indication of what I felt at their comments on my chest. I made eye-contact, I did not stim or raise my voice. I answered their questions patiently. I spoke when spoken

to. In hindsight, I felt more like Bergman in his girlhood than I ever had before, rarely had I felt so trapped as I did then. Bergman had to “sit quietly [...] knees together, walk softly [and] not make noise” as a child; butchness was his liberation (BN 38). Meanwhile, my path to liberation demanded obedience, scrupulousness to ensure my masculinity was as credible as my feminized deference: shirtless, breasted beneath the fluorescent glow. All this for the privilege of begging for care, if it was indeed *care* that I sought. Much as it claims pro-transness, transmedical narratives necessarily privilege the doctor as ultimate designator of “true-gender,” even while also claiming gender is an innate and unchosen sensation.

Narrative Domestication: Martino's Queer2Straight Transition

While contemporary separation of sexuality and gender, combined with the "T"'s growing inclusion in the LGBTQ+ initialism, suggests transness as a distinct experience not inherently tied to sexuality, this was until recently not the case. Rather, the legitimate transsexual subject was to pursue a straight timeline if "he or she" was to be truly-trans; this term itself a paradox in that it was deemed both self-evident and nonexistent prior to medical diagnosis.

Nevertheless, some lived in this contradiction, a story antithetical to transbutch identity and politics. This is not a transness of liminality, but a transness that reifies cisness as normalcy; that positions itself as a medical aberration to be cured in a predictable, teleological manner.

Mario Martino's story exemplifies the transmedical counterpoint to transbutchness: his strategic denials, foreclosures, and erasures frames medical transition as a means of entering heterosexuality. It is transition running counter to the belief that permeates many queer cultural spaces today: that trans is somehow "especially" or "extra" queer. Martino's life reveals that, in fact, a trans life can be extra-queer in a completely different sense: it can be entirely outside the realm of queerness; it can be an embodied refusal of it. Martino does this narratively by placing his life in/as straight time, a term in opposition to Halberstam's (2005) description of "queer time" as "in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (1). Instead, Martino presents his transness as proof of his hetero-potential, and of the straightness of both his gender/sexuality and his lifestyle: he is a straight man "trapped" in a woman's body. He spends his life and narrative desperate to shed this unwanted queerness (which would foreclose any possibility of living a respectable life) and thus transitioning from queer to straight.

The medical industry codified the belief that transness was only permissible if it would straighten a gay person, and used such criteria to evaluate whether or not particular trans patients were legitimate. Dr. Benjamin pioneered the scale on which the “true transsexuals” would be distinguished by the (usually queer) “pseudo-transvestites,” as he describes in his then-ground-breaking 1966 work *The Transsexual Phenomenon*. One was only considered a “true transsexual” if they were born in a body that inhibited them from being the straight, gender-conforming person they knew themselves to be. (Accordingly, many patients simply read the book and learned, as we continue to do today, to act the part of the good trans person). Benjamin’s restrictive rhetorics long barred — and in many cases, still bar — queer/gender non-conforming trans people from access to medical intervention^{6,7}

Benjamin’s strict standards for transness allowed Martino to consolidate his real-manness — that is, his cis-likeness — at others’ expense. Such denials were especially acute at the time of Benjamin’s writing, when “transsexualism” was not yet in the DSM, and “homosexuality” still was: why, in the minds of the medical industry, perform interventions that appeared to *make* disorder? Care was deemed not worthwhile unless deployed to “[cure]...sex-, gender-, and sexuality-related ambiguities,” or, as butch blogger Eve writes, to make them [heterosexually] “fuckable.”^{8,9} This resulted in those like gay trans man Lou Sullivan being denied access to the

⁶ Serano, Julia. *Whipping Girl: a Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. Seal Press, 2016. pp. 233-234.

⁷ Sullivan, Lou, and Judy Van Maasdam. “Digital Transgender Archive.” Digital Transgender Archive, Correspondence Between Judy Van Maasdam and Lou Sullivan (November 1979-January 1980).

⁸ Strongorcbutch, Eve. “Hi. I’m a Trans Woman. I’m a Lesbian. A Butch.” *Hi. I’m a Trans Woman. I’m a Lesbian. A Butch.*, 2 Nov. 2019, strongorcbutch.tumblr.com/post/188758081872/.

⁹ Serano, 202.

means of transition by a post-Benjamin medical establishment, forcing Sullivan into a lifetime of relentless self-advocacy until his untimely death from AIDS at age thirty-nine. Martino's legitimacy as a trans person, according to Benjamin's standards, is predicated on the exclusion of queer others such as Sullivan, and of any queer possibility for Martino himself.¹⁰ Martino, in a near-comical re-presentation of transness as a result of medical authorization, allows Benjamin to literally *intervene* in his narrative (autobiography) by writing the foreword. Benjamin's prior approval thus appears even before Martino's voice in Martino's own autobiography.

Martino's story reveals a perception of medicalized transness as having normative, straight-potential, the assumption of which lingers decades after its publication (PM133). Martino's own understanding of his assigned-femaleness not only as an impediment to his manhood, but as an impediment of his heterosexuality to be ultimately cured (Benjamin, 1966). In addition, Martino dedicated *Emergence* to Benjamin, specifically for "[giving] respectability to the gender-disoriented" (E). Martino, who is himself a nurse, owes his own respectability (and that of his autobiography) to medical approval, and also reinscribes the importance of trans medical approval by giving Harry Benjamin himself space in his story. Benjamin speaks to aspects of Martino that Martino himself, due to institutional cissexism, is "unauthorized" to address. As Ivan Coyote remarks bitterly in regard to their own trans-diagnostic process, Martino must invoke a medical professional "trained in this stuff...to sign off that [Martino does] in fact have a bona fide gender identity disorder, but that someone cannot be [Martino], because [he is] not qualified" (GF79). Replacing Martino's relatively-powerless voice, Benjamin enters the text, confirms

¹⁰ This exclusion of possibility seems a hallmark of cisheterosexual life more generally.

its veracity, and, indeed, grants Martino's "disorientation" respectability: reorienting him toward straightness, moving his memoir from one of tragedy to one of cure.

In agreement with Benjamin, Martino and many of his contemporaries understood heterosexuality to be a constituent element of correct (true trans) gender embodiment. At the time, transness was impossible without the promise of heterosexuality. In documenting his own coming of age, Martino implies that the converse is also true: recognition of one's own transness is a response to some demonstrated failure of cis-heterosexuality. For Martino, this is exemplified in his inability to fulfill what he believes to be a woman's sexual role: receiving penetration. In an early sexual encounter, his vagina "refused to do the job" and this experience "sealed [his trans] fate [...] [he] knew [he] could never live as a female [...] it was all some horrendous mistake" (E94-95). His body, here, becomes "wrong" not only because it is not a man's but because he believes it not to be doing its job as a woman's. It is only later that Martino affirms his hetero-manhood with his girlfriend, Becky, who he says has "become a woman" after they first have sex (E114). Martino, for his part, has become a man: he found his role within a heterosexual framework, now only needing to "[emerge] from this labyrinth of erroneous human anatomy" (E141). His fight for *real-manhood* is borne of intrinsic need, yes, but also spurred by an unshakable desire to live, somehow, as a "normal" gender.

Following what he identifies as a failure of hetero-womanhood, Martino doubles down on his own assertions of heterosexual manhood, vocally subordinating lesbianism to the heterosexuality he seeks. He strategically counters presumptions of his lesbianism by expressing his own cisheteropatriarchal aspirations — aspirations he both deems as having already manifested, and whose existence he must continuously prove. Writing that "[a]ny resemblance to lesbianism

[between himself and Becky]...was due to [his] lack of the *proper organs*,” [emphasis mine] he reifies both lesbianism-as-inherently-lacking (a penis) and of particular organs alone as constitutive of sex and sexuality (E116).¹¹ Additionally, the supposed-social deviation of lesbianism represents a restriction on his self-expression: in short, it represented not a successful queerness (unthinkable to Martino) but a failed heterosexuality. When Becky, his longtime girlfriend and later wife, is asked about “her butch,” referring to Martino, he tells Becky that he wishes to become a man, in part, so ““no one could ever make those hurtful remarks”” (E123). Not only is being deemed Becky’s “butch” a painful act of misgendering, but it also carries the threat of social ostracization, which he desperately wants to escape. Martino does not only ascribe the hurt of being called “butch” to his own, internal experience of misgendering, but identifies the comment as hurtful to Becky, too: to even be associated with butchness and lesbianism is in and of itself pejorative. Transition becomes not only a movement toward truth but an escape from oppression, oppression fueled by an imagined deviance inherent to lesbianism.

Martino also uses lesbianism’s perceived sexual deficiencies as metaphors for the foreclosure of the (re)productive straight-life he so longs for, and presents transness as a path toward that idealized life. Upon seeing the newborn babies while nursing in his hospital’s postpartum unit, he “fantasize[s] [about] being the proud husband helping his wife [...] delivering our fine baby into its mothers’ — [his] *wife’s!* — arms” (E124). This echoes a childhood passage, in which a young girl friend expresses wanting “a husband and three kids,” while Martino realizes he wants to “marry her [him]self” (E33). Throughout childhood, he “fantasized about the woman [he] would marry, whose children [he] would father” (E28). Martino knows he is a man

¹¹ The idea that no lesbian sex involves a penis; that straight sex must involve one penis and one vagina; is another point of similarity between TERFs and transmedicalists.

because and therefore he has long sought marriage, children, and the trappings of (middle-class, white, american) cisgender, heterosexual life, one whose existence for himself and other “true trans” people he later affirms as an adult by invoking their collective college-educated, gainfully-employed status (E167). In addition to overcoming others’ erroneous beliefs in his lesbianism, he doubles down on both his heterosexuality and his straight lifestyle. He desires women as a man, but *proves* this to readers by including marriage, children, and financial success alongside it: he is a *real man* because his manhood invents him as socially cohesive, as having a future about which to fantasize at all. Likewise, he buttresses his intense desire for “the surgical procedure for sex change” with a longing for legal sex change and subsequent ability to marry Becky (E119). Ultimate diagnosis of transsexuality holds the possibility for Martino’s queerness to be resolved: he is not a “homosexual, transvestite, schizoid, psychopath, or exhibitionist” (E145). His suffering can be recovered from, he can be reincorporated into normal life, and he is “approved for re-orientation” (E145). With each pathology he eliminates from the realm of possibility, with each reproductive possibility with which he replaces it, Martino grows “truer” in his transness.

Martino embodies the straight path he pursues by following a medically-prescribed model of transition from non-normativity to normativity, and a metaphoric model of transition from confusion to certainty. Martino, per his doctor’s orders, received hormone therapy for a year, all the while living out his real-life test to ensure his appropriate passibility as a man; if unsuccessful, he would be “refeminized” (E146). After hormonal success, he graduated to a mastectomy, then a hysterectomy and oophorectomy, and finally a phalloplasty — an order that represents a gradual increase in the severity/seriousness of his manhood (E146). This model, which begins with hormones, moves through top surgery and ends in bottom surgery, is no longer required of

every single trans patient. However, it lingers still in the corners of the doctor's office, as a de facto rule that poses material barriers to many trans people, some of which I discuss elsewhere in regard Ivan Coyote, whose medical journey functions as a foil to Martino's (GF75-80; 110-113). Rather than expression of possibility, Martino's movement through gender was a predictable course of treatment, in which he sought to leave "uncertainties behind" and "no longer [be] a man searching for himself" (E146; 239-240). Hormonal transition — "second puberty" — mirrors adolescence; its positioning as precursor to surgical intervention mirrors the positioning of adolescence as a period of unruliness prior to adulthood, a site of experimentation that would be grown-out-of: in this case by a course of surgeries that would indicate the legitimacy and completion of sexual crossing.

So-called completed crossings are not only critical to the legitimacy of the trans patient, but also to upholding the institution of cisheterosexuality. In addition to affirming medical control over trans bodies, Martino's orderly and complete transition can be viewed as a guarantee of his body as an object and possessor of heterosexual desire, even though legitimate transness required the presupposition that he was a man — object of desire for straight women — all along. According to sex essentialist logics, true heterosexual desire may only occur between one man with a penis and one woman with a vagina; transition signifies not the "possibility of created gender [or sexuality]" but a bid for the hetero-capable future he was "meant to have" (GO199). Pre-transition, though, his heterosexual relationship with Becky carries with it the markers of lesbianism, with lesbianism and the *femaleness* associated with it necessitating the presence of breasts and a vagina (E112). Martino's forty-four inch bustline, for Becky, forecloses the possibility of straight desire for him. It marks Martino as "*almost* male," but not-quite; he

appears to be “masquerading” as a man, gender-incomplete (E116). As such, Martino’s pursuit of “complete” transition is a bid for a “true” heterosexual relationship with a woman. Claiming that, by his count, 95% of the woman partners of (“true-”)trans men had never “engaged in a lesbian relationship” before meeting their now-husbands, he reaffirms medical transition as a pathway to heterosexual relationality and recognition, both for the trans subject and “his or her” partner (E243).

Later, Martino expands on the importance not only of obtaining but of “completing” transition, to become not only a heterosexual subject but a sexual subject at all. Without the completion of a full-transition, Martino writes, he would become a “pathetic” case — one who began hormones and even received a mastectomy, and ultimately chose to “reverse” their transition (E169). Martino emphasizes that it is the attainment of surgery that marks the point of no return in terms of bodily transition: while a year’s parole on hormones would be reversed upon the failure of correct gender-performance, surgery was permanent. To receive some surgeries, but not others, was to be “neutered”: sexual capacity outside the cisheterosexual body not only deviant, but null — incapable of partnership and thus, of normal life (E169). Instead, completed transition is a foregone conclusion to a pathological childhood, a fulfillment of his “right” to live *the good life* — a straight life.

Martino’s narrative relies on a number of assumptions: the most central is that a healthy subject must be one of two opposing sexgenders. These sexgenders must not have overlap in experience, they must be attracted to one another, and one of which each of us must embody properly. With mutually-exclusive identity categories and a positivist approach to identification, there is no room for a complex understanding of lived experience, nor a space to allow our pasts,

presents, and futures to mingle. Instead, there is the whitewashing that allows him to deem his birth-assignment a mere obstacle to overcome, to cure, to set aside as he settles into heterosexual, cis-assimilated manhood. Ultimately, his birth assignment — his cross-gender experience — must be erased in order to straighten out his story — he “eliminat[es]...[his] trans history” to make his straight manhood. Not only does he eliminate it, but he specifically cures it: a call-back to transness’s early framing as [emphasis mine] “Harry Benjamin *Syndrome*” a syndrome, an illness, is framed as a thing to be cured and eliminated (GO103). This places cis, straight womanhood as members of the “same side,” part of a pro-social, healthy life from which transness deviates. The goal of the transsexual, according to Martino and those like him, is one as paradoxical as the assertion that one is simultaneously always-already trans and not trans before diagnosis. In this case, the trans goal is not to cross genders, but to erase any need for gender-crossing: it is a tool for erasure. After all, failure to perform appropriate erasure would through the cisheteropatriarchal establishment into disarray, destabilizing the boundaries between gay and straight, man and woman: Would a boy who looks fondly upon his past as a girl qualify as an object of straight women's desire? Which side would he be on?

Transness & The Politics of Self-Naming

My father and I have periodic discussions about my gender. Recently, he told me: “nothing else made sense [in terms of my gender] than being ‘both or neither.’ You have both and neither; I never felt like you were a girl but never thought you were a boy. I didn’t know how to communicate with you before because I didn’t have anything to call it.”

(“This whole problem is called hermeneutical injustice,” I cut in unhelpfully.)

“Whatever it’s called. Without you, I wouldn’t know this nonbinary stuff...but ever since I learned about it I can talk to you more easily because I have an idea of who I’m talking to.”

*

I gained access to Miranda Fricker’s (2007) term “epistemic injustice” while doing research in the summer of 2019, and felt it gravely and ironically telling that until then I had had no knowledge the term existed. Since first hearing it, I have begun to “come to [theoretical] terms” with the discursive violence LGBTQ+ people (that is, the people who will later learn they are, or become, LGBTQ+, queer, trans, gay, etc.) face. As a child, I did not know it was possible for *me* to be trans. This changed when I learned that that genderqueerness and nonbinariness existed as words and practices; prior to that I knew only the binary transness which clearly did not apply to me. Trapped, bad-at-girlhood and worse-at-womanhood, I didn’t know it was possible to be “good-at-transness.” The closest word I knew for someone neither man nor woman was an antiquated slur for intersex people, both inaccurate to my experience and deeply offensive. Later, before I came up with transbutch, I felt I was *nothing*, stumbling over myself, hindered by massive semantic gaps that made me feel foolish, and *fake*. The unavailability of the term “nonbinary lesbian,” foreclosed my ability to self-conceptualize as one, even though I knew prior to becom-

ing a lesbian that I was only attracted to non-men, as a non-man. My inaccess to language through which to interpret our lives is known as hermeneutical injustice, and afflicts a large number of LGBTQ+ people regardless of identity or social group. This is only an anecdotal comment, but the experience of hermeneutical injustice is one of the only “universal”-seeming experiences we all seem to share across place, time, body, and circumstance.

Hermeneutical injustice is more than just a denial of words: it functions as a vehicle for isolation, devaluation, and restriction. Introductions to ourselves as slurs, not people, forecloses many from identifying with words like “butch” and “lesbian” — a masculine woman dating femme narrator Kimberly Dark refused both, “even though she slept with women and expressed her female gender femininity-free”¹². Dark herself had to practice “saying the word ‘lesbian’ to herself in the mirror,” to overcome internalized stigma¹³ Proud butch Brenda Barnes struggled to accept the word due to her family’s purposeful avoidance of it, considering it (and, by extension, Barnes herself) “unsightly”.¹⁴ We ourselves internalize and replicate these rhetorics of inappropriateness, even when we do know who and what we are: Dark’s girlfriend “*knew what she was* [...] but she never called herself lesbian, gay, queer, or any other such thing”¹⁵. Ivan Coyote’s first girlfriend introduced them to her parents as her “roommate,” and claimed to Coyote that she was not queer and their relationship was “by accident.” (TB41).

¹² Dark, Kimberly. “My First Lover Was Not a Lesbian.” Coyote, Ivan E., and Zena Sharman, eds. *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012.

¹³ Dark, 2012.

¹⁴ Barnes, Brenda. “Butch is How I Feel.” Coyote, Ivan E., and Zena Sharman, eds. *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012.

¹⁵ Dark, 2012.

Self-denial is no accident: it is the result of circulating attitudes toward those terms now deemed too taboo to associate with.

Due to the multilayered relations of power undergirding language and its implications, simply providing marginalized people the language for our identities — including “lesbian” and “butch” — is not enough to remedy hermeneutical injustice, especially when such language is not the community’s own invention. With transness, this issue becomes even more complex: the term is medically-gatekept as well as socially stigmatized, leaving us in the strange position of begging to be marked as *real deviants*. Like the framing of “butch” and “lesbian” as slurs, trans pathologization also leads to devaluation, isolation, and restriction: but the latter does so by severely restricting the realm of legible gender-crossing behavior (such that it hardly appears as “crossing” at all) and deeming all legitimate gender-crossing an undesirable illness rather than a creative opportunity. It is ludicrous to attempt to build a positive community around a lived experience you are trying to eradicate without a trace: recall the ways that butch/femme communities thrived not on a shared sense of shame, but rather a shared commitment to survival, in spite of the continuous assault of homophobia demanding their disappearance.

When it comes to material trans communities, we see the deleterious impacts of the language that demands erasure, placing early trans spaces in stark contrast with the b/f bars of the 1930s-50s.. With only “transsexualism” available to them, Martino and his generation of trans people had virtually no community access outside medically-facilitated support groups. They were not in community with each other because they had a shared political commitment or even a shared “trans[sexual]” identity, but because they happened to be (“stable, well-adjusted”) pa-

tients suffering from the same so-called “disease” (E214). There was no language through which they could communicate their shared experiences that was not invented and circulated by a medical system that wanted them to disappear. When Martino ends his narrative with a plea for understanding, he compares “transsexuality” to being born “imperfect [...] as a cleft palate, club-foot, or other abnormality” (E218). When left with the limiting language of deviance, even appeals for toleration become reassertions of the supposed-inferiority of trans people, disabled/disabled people, and all intersections therein. A system of testimonial injustice — the delegitimization of one's voice based on prejudice against their positionality — also forces us to police our own narratives and terminological usage, and thus reaffirming the hermeneutically-unjust system I describe above.¹⁶

We are thus compelled not only to submit to the terminology invented for us by medico-legal authorities and other hegemonic forces, but denies us the ability to question them. Further, it renders us vulnerable if and when we reveal narratives counter to their own, especially, for transbitches (who may have to submit to the medical gaze while unable to “correctly” fulfill its demands; who are gender-disordered but often marked as not “trans enough”), when under the gaze of the medico-psychiatric industry. Even in the case of “butch” and “lesbian,” no longer explicitly medicalized, we as marginalized people are expected to submit to definitions determined by power.

*

In the absence of non-derogatory names for ourselves, we can also make our own, hoping community based on shared presence rather than lack may form. For example, as I will discuss in

¹⁶ Fricker, 1-8.

more depth elsewhere, several narrators (especially Bergman) describe effeminate butchnesses and masculinities with terms like “f*gggy butchness,” which I will discuss at length later on; it combines an act of slur-reclamation with naming a heretofore invisibilized way of butching. It invites inquiry into a butchness not simply trans because it involves “medical transition,” but trans because it crosses from butch masculinity into effeminacy, using the act of becoming butch as a jumping-off point from which to trans-form one’s gender once more. This style of identification may be considered *queer-of-queer*,¹⁷ what Kate Bornstein called *PoMoSexual* in the eponymous 1997 collection.¹⁸

For some queer and trans people of color, the absence of non-derogatory terminologies of selfhood is even more pronounced — for example, the genocidal elimination of many Indigenous gender terminologies in favor of exoticizing, dehumanizing slurs. In coining “masculine-of-center (MOC),” J. Cole (director of the Brown Boi Project) intervened on dominant discourses of “minority masculinity” advanced by white theorists, including Halberstam (XY97-99). In 2008, against a backdrop of race-and-class-constrained terms like butch, stud, and aggressive (AG), MoC was a transbutch act of intervention into so-called “classical” butchness, which has — as the genre conventions I observe suggest — “produc[ed] representations of itself” rather than allowing for a multiplicity of queer masculinities to take shape (XY101). Cole’s MoC allows solidarity across subgroups of QTPoC, who “live their female masculinity through the lens of race” (XY105). Cole centers the transition from a [white] transbutchness to an honest examina-

¹⁷ A term chiefly inspired by C. Riley Snorton’s “doubly trans,” or a transness after and beyond the concerns of “transgender” that disidentifies with the uncomplicated, gender-exclusive crossing single-trans narratives put forth. (Snorton, 8).

¹⁸ I tend to stay away from value-judgements of terms from different times and contexts, but am in this case fairly comfortable in saying that mine is better.

tion of the racial politics of hybrid, moving, and unnameable relationships to sexuality and gender, in line with the double-transness Snorton describes.

Not only this, but the term serves as a call to action, not just a means of community identification: masculine-of-center people carry in their name and ethos a commitment to honoring their gender-disobedience while also “reshap[ing] female masculinity” from the inside out, in a way that Cole describes as “more genderqueer than historical interpretations of butch” (XY104). We see here echoes of 2S identification, grounded not in shared pathology but rather in community-wide resistance to white, binary gender norms. With MoC, Cole was not seeking a term meant to convey an ontological truth about her relationship to gender and sexuality, but instead a name to collect and hold she and her kin as they resisted multiple hegemonic masculinities — white, cis, straight, western, *and* male. MoC is a beautiful example of transbutch identification-with rather than identification-as: rather than erasing its constituent studs, butches, butchas, bois, AGs, and more, it facilitates solidarity among them (XY99). Cole’s call to action is precisely what I hope to put forward in discussing transbutchness, and precisely what the most prolific accounts of the “border wars” ignore.

*

I just feel trapped in the wake of term-denial, with mounting pressure to pledge allegiance to a classificatory category. I did not create “transbutch,” but I intend to use it in a distinct way, not simply as something that means “transitioning butch” but as a way to refuse definition. It is a way of saying, we have been denied language, and do not simply need to rehabilitate our identities in speakable terms, but step beyond them. Transbutch is a non-response to the “who’s a what” question that establishes citizenship on one border-side or another (NE95). It is a question

grounded in an understandable fear: when one's terminologies have always been pejoratives, it can be tempting to consolidate meaning as an effort at restoration. (If "lesbian" was once a bad word, now it must not only be a "good" word, but a word lesbians have *mastery* over. The same goes for "trans," except with the further complication that those who claim mastery over it also tend to believe it is contingent on a diagnosis.) But these semantic battles become border wars, the result of an epistemically-unjust landscape, in which it takes so long to arrive at the language for ourselves that we get there thinking further complication is impossible and even unthinkable.

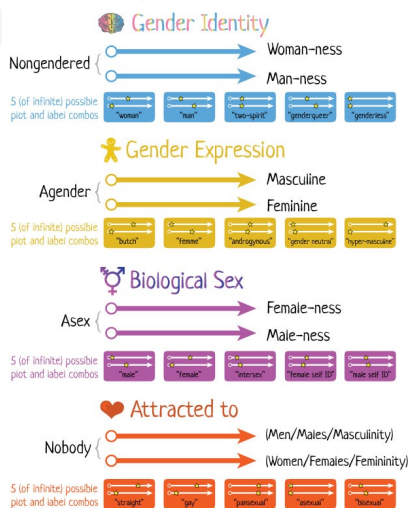
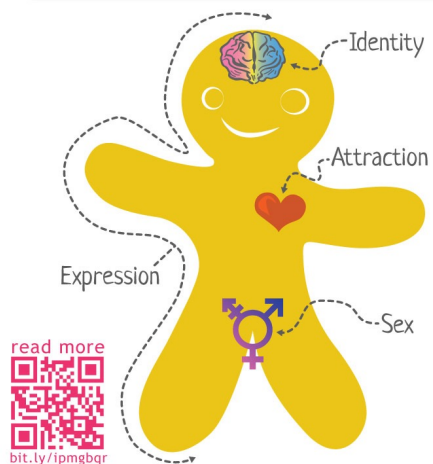
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Due to the contemporary bifurcation of gender and sexual identity, the term "transbutch" becomes a semantic impossibility; an unthinkable situation. It simultaneously denies the womanhood now attached to the "butch" label and the individualized pathology attached to "trans." This separation of gender and sexuality have been taken up by everyone from the World Health Organization (WHO) ("[t]ransgender refers to gender identity and gender expression, and has *nothing to do with sexual orientation*") to the overwhelming majority of mainstream LGBTQ organizations and educational materials.¹⁹ This view, now hegemonic, is responsible for the semantic impossibilization of "transbutch" and terms like it. If sexuality and gender are only as related as opposite wheels on the same bicycle, surely there is no reason not to leave a space between them – especially given that transness is a marked disorder whereas queerness has been depathologized for twice as long as I've been alive.

¹⁹ "WHO/Europe Brief – Transgender Health in the Context of ICD-11." World Health Organization, World Health Organization, 14 Feb. 2020, www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/gender/gender-definitions/who-europe-brief-transgender-health-in-the-context-of-icd-11.

The Genderbread Person v2.0 by its pronounced METROsexual.com

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don't. Like *Inception*. Gender isn't binary. It's not either/or. In many cases it's both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for understanding. It's okay if you're hungry for more.



This turn toward separation is emblemized by the lefthand image of the “Genderbread Person, v2.0”.²⁰ One of my first encounters with concepts of genderqueer/nonbinary embodiment, this graph-

ic was released in 2012.

The image delineates gender identity, expression, "biological sex" (unproblematized), and attraction, placing them as separate scales within one bodymind²¹. They can now be mixed and matched, and it is common to “come out” separately as one’s sexual orientation and gender — when I first came out to my mother, I told her I was 1) panromantic (in many 2014 queer youth circles, it was unfashionable to use “bi” as it was perceived to exclude nonbinary people; most of us were between ages thirteen and seventeen with little to no exposure to bi history/cultural context) 2) asexual (an identity I carried with me until midway through my first year of college, at which time I allowed myself to self-describe as a lesbian) and 3) genderfluid. At the time, I was sure I needed to develop precise, even novel terminology to ensure a “true” representation of my

²⁰ Killerman, Sam. “The Genderbread Person version 2.” March 2012. <https://www.itpronouncedmetrosexual.com/2012/03/the-genderbread-person-v2-0/>.

²¹ Similar charts often distinguish “romantic,” “sexual,” and “sensual” attraction, which — despite receiving some warranted criticism (see Mintythings. “The Split Attraction Model.” Some Open Space, 23 Aug. 2015, someopen-space.wordpress.com/2015/08/23/the-split-attraction-model/ for more on this) — is useful among asexual and/or aromantic people.

gender and sexuality, respectively. I believed there was a truth inside me that I could, with the right language, fully represent.

This is true for many people, and incredible, spontaneous scholarship is emerging on social media sites like Tumblr as young people experiment with the limits of gender identification language, trans-forming aesthetics, disabilities, and more into markers for when the gender binary fails us. For many others, sexuality and gender are only tangentially related — my great-aunt remained attracted to women when she transitioned (luckily, this did not immediately disqualify her as it did for Lou Sullivan and his peers) something I, at age eight, thought to be perfectly logical. And it is! For my part, my identities changed, yet remained parceled, until around 2017, when increasingly-close connections to fellow lesbians and access to (sometimes ahistorically-represented) butch/femme conceptions of gender-crossing, my gender and sexuality merged toward transbutch. I saw people writing pithy, two-sentence posts about being “butchgender” and the like; that their genders *were* lesbianism. As my trans awakening had been shepherded by none other than Judith Butler, via *Gender Trouble*, I can in part attribute this lesbian awakening to Monique Wittig’s materialist conception of gender and of lesbianism. Marking “woman” as a myth preserved in its binary relationship with “man,” Wittig argues that, with the abolition of class, gender, too — merely a political and economic category — would disintegrate²². Following this logic, the lesbian (who in their lesbianism refuses a binary relationship with men as a class) is not a woman, as such, but still exists in some relation to womanhood as a class oppressed under patriarchy.

²² Wittig, Monique. *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Beacon Press, 2002. p.15.

I knew for certain that I was a lesbian then, not because I'm a "chick who digs chicks" (how my father described lesbianism when asking me how I, a genderless person, could be one) but because I'm *not* a chick who digs chicks. Because I take issue with the "chick," for more reasons than its condescending ring. Because my deviation from anticipated lesbian, butch, and trans(-)scripts place me within the framework of each, just as does my defection from girl-womanhood. My difference calls back to a common historical lineage, opening and continuing conversation, and allowing me to be in conversation with scholars I respect.²³ That is what language has come to mean to me, what has led me to transbutchness: rather than signifying an inner, static truth, it is an entrance point into a conversation that never needs to end.

Once I realized this — and I realized it long before I write these words in 2020, only in clunkier and less polished language — I felt I could, theoretically, let go of my need to pursue precise labels for myself. After all, I discovered, what were hyper-specific terminologies but mechanisms of enclosure? The language whose masters did epistemic injustice to my queer, trans self is not the path to knowing my queer, trans self better: and anyway, what if queer is my gender and trans (is my) sexuality? What if, perhaps, it was more liberating to cast a big tent, a purposeful choice of solidarity over precision?

For many of us, the connections between gender and sexuality are far more complex — personally, relationally, and (crucially) *ideologically* — than simply sharing a subject. Being ideologically queer and trans displaces any "independent" gender-related desire for me, and further exposes that gender, sexuality, and ideology are never far apart. If I were a man, I would not be a lesbian, and even if I continued to desire women, that desire would take a different shape than it

²³ Truly, theoretical engagement — academia as a whole — has probably been the most influential factor in my personal growth, relationships, and identity development, and I have a visceral relationship with the texts I read.

does now. If I were a woman, I know, my lesbianism would be similarly-different. If I was a man or woman *of trans experience* — S. Bear Bergman’s promising alternative to essentializing “socialization” arguments around gender and behavior, which I discuss later on — my desires would be further complicated, perhaps even enhanced.²⁴ With these connections both inside and outside subjects in mind, borders start to look far fuzzier: they take on time, a fourth dimension not representable in our 3-D reality.

Were they butch, trans, both, or neither?

When does the butch “turn trans”? (How many grains of sand before it becomes a beach?) (How many drops before the ocean?)

When did my lesbianism begin?

When did my girlhood end?

How much of this is still happening, all at once; how much is happening again in its telling?

*

A Disclaimer: I could not write this thesis if I had not already received my mastectomy and hysterectomy. I could not say, my body-rage expands and encompasses far more than that which might be contained in “dysphoria.” I could not say, I was a little girl, and I liked it, and when I go home for the holidays I am going to buy some sickly, dessert-scented Bath & Body Works candles and write poetry in my sheep-patterned nightgown. I am effeminate.

Here, I am

²⁴ Bergman, S. Bear. “Brother Dog” Coyote, Ivan E., and Zena Sharman, eds. *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012.

a transbutch: My butchness cannot be straight, uncrossing. This is not the path in which “trans” is supposed to go. I wear more girls’ clothes now than I have since I was sixteen. The word I believed was mine was “failed girl, failed trans, failed lesbian, failed body.” We have long been well-versed in the lexicon of failure, sometimes the only language we know.

(How lesbian am I? I wear exactly one key on my carabiner, which I bought at least a decade ago with no understanding of the cultural implications — I just wanted a green keychain.)

(How trans am I? Green was my favorite color until my kindergarten friend told me that a girl’s favorite color had to be pink.)

Testosterone As Discourse, Testosterone As Symbol

I started on one pump a day, only one-quarter of the standard (trans man's) dose. I'm at four now, and I have no specific reason to keep using it, other than my desire to. As a lesbian, this is the scariest reason of all. There is a line I fear I'm breaching, and yet I am most fearful of the fact that I continue to breach it.

My first quarter-dose of testosterone (T) was on May 25th, 2017. It was the first [professionally-facilitated] act of "medical transition" I had ever made: the first time I did something unequivocally trans to my body. My then-new general (predictably, I first wrote "genderal") practitioner was (and is) not only trans-competent but trans-affirming. She uses an informed-consent model; aware I was not at the time, nor did I plan to "transition" to male²⁵. She made the process easy, sending me from our second appointment on the subject with a fresh prescription I picked up that same day. The use of T, even the minuscule dose I began with, would function as partial "insurance" of my insurance company's later approval of my top surgery, which becomes significantly easier to justify once other normative steps of the "transition" process have been undertaken. Apart from the medical advantageousness of starting T, this would also be my own, quiet experiment whose purpose and parameters remained unknown to me. How trans could I get before I negated the butch? How much T before a man emerged; how many grains of sand before a beach?

In many ways, this was a foolish question to ask. Hormones are, in truth, not binarily sexed: more accurately called "steroid hormones," the simple names "testosterone" and "estro-

²⁵ Paraphrased from Coyote in (GF194).

gen" (including in telling exclamations like, "there's too much testosterone in this room!") obfuscate far more complex chemical realities. Rather than being singular male and female sex hormones, testosterone is just one of six types of androgens, into which the supposedly-female sex hormone estrogen can be metabolized. Estrogen, it could be said, uses "plural they" pronouns: there are three of them. Androgens and estrogens do not singlehandedly produce binary sexed characteristics, and work in ways that remain a mystery for scholars.²⁶ Nevertheless, the physical and psychological e/affects of hormones are interpreted through a binary sexgendered framework. "Sex" is a concept responsible for producing its own supposedly-self-evident reality in a terminal loop: the material to which sexgender essentialism and dimorphism is attributed is actually produced by the ideological frame of sexgender dimorphism itself.²⁷ ²⁸ For me, that meant that although I knew T not to be inherently man-making, it still marked (and preserved) the metaphoric boundary between "man" and "woman," or, in my case, "trans" and "butch." Both the symbolic ritual of taking T (which gradually "masculinizes" over time), and the evidence it leaves of itself, facilitates its marking of a "point of no return" between trans and butch.

*

And it really is framed as a point of no return: we are warned about irreversibility and fed fear-mongering stories of regretted transition and subsequent "detransition" as deterrence.

*

²⁶ "The 'Male Sex Hormone' and the Testosterone Gold Rush." *Sex Science Self: A Social History of Estrogen, Testosterone, and Identity*, by Bob Ostertag, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst; Boston, 2016, pp. 50–61. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1hd19r3.7.

²⁷ Whitehead, Jaye C, et al. "The Proof Is in the Pudding": How Mental Health Practitioners View the Power of 'Sex Hormones' in the Process of Transition." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2015, pp. 623–650., doi:10.15767/feministstudies.41.3.623. p. 625.

²⁸ Parisi, Luciana. "The Bio-Technological Impact' and 'Abstract Sex'". *Queer Feminist Science Studies: A Reader*, edited by C Cipolla et al., University of Washington Press, 2017.

In the most conventional trans narratives, T is the first (and ongoing) in a series of “three procedures” that, upon completion (“cure”), will result in a “complete(d) transition” into a new sexgender category, and thus into a new social life (E146). Though still viewed today as “how [transition] is supposed to go,” T was once the *exclusive* gateway to surgery and gender legitimation, only possible after a year of hormone-aided role-play in/as one’s new gender (GF78). This becomes a means both of visual and of social assimilation, community belonging via the acquisition of “male”-associated physical attributes, many of which also mark the perceived chemical difference between “butch” and “trans”. In *PoMoSexuals*, David Harrison even deems T the vehicle that that moves him from “butch dyke” to “gay man” by giving him his “sideburns [...] goatee, [and] a hairy belly” (PM133). In his narrative, he uses these changes to explain his new-found position as an object of gay male sexual desire. Rae Spoon presents T as a body-based gateway to social life, writing that they were [emphasis mine] “anxious to *join*” their trans friends to obtain the “stereotypical body that [they] thought a man was supposed to have,” in other words, anxious to simultaneously belong in the group called “[trans] men” and to physically “pass” into the group from butchness. Butch writer Anne Fleming notes that some of her friends, once-butches started T and began transition, because their bodies were not readable as “masculine-enough” without T’s influence. Fleming herself comments that “[her] body conformed less well to [her] *ability to appear butch*...[with] bigger hips of gi-normous [sic] boobs or a girlier face [emphasis mine]” she may have made the very same decision, using T as a

means of passage when the way is otherwise blocked.^{29 30} In addition to facilitating positive gender-crossing, T can also lead to dangerous passage: or transmasculine people of color, especially Black transmasculine people, such belonging can be as much a site of danger as a site of community: to look increasingly like a Black man is to be perceived, increasingly, as a threat — this, too, is a marker of (visible, and in this case, racialized) real-manhood (XY328). In all cases, T produces a body visually able to move into new sexgendered social spaces, a body that is “real.”

Accompanying the physical changes are perceived changes in energy and character, which suggest deeper-held beliefs about sexgendered, hormone-driven “nature.” T itself is given a personality, entering the body in a “near manic [man-ic] rush” and bringing about a “more visceral” way of feeling (UB 209; 319).³¹ Contradictorily, it also “smooth[s] out” and “calm[s] down” the erstwhile hysteric — producing, in line with patriarchal presumptions about sexgendered characteristics, both a wildness and aggression *and* a post-emotional rationality (ARG141) (UB319). Uncontrollable *sexual* aggression counts among these traits, too: people become “randier” while on T, seeking out more sexual experiences than before (this is attributed exclusively to his use of testosterone and not to increasing post-top surgery bodily-comfort) (UB365). In her paper *Fleshy Specificity: (Re)considering Transsexual Subjects in Lesbian Communities*, Kelly Coogan quotes trans man photographer Loren Cameron self-describing as a ““randy,

²⁹ Fleming, Anne. “A Dad Called Mum.” Coyote, Ivan E., and Zena Sharman, eds. *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012.

³⁰ While Fleming presents a strict divide between the transitioning (to male) body and the butch body, I add that biomedical interventions like the ones she stated could also help someone become “more-but” in the wake of first-puberty-related changes.

³¹ Córdova, Jeanne. “The New Politics of Butch”. Coyote, Ivan E., and Zena Sharman, eds. *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012.

greasy kind of guy who is more than a little irritable” while on T.³² He pairs this description of himself with an image of himself “violently smash[ing] a glass bottle against a chain fence.”³³ T is the thing that *fuels* that highly-sexual, randy greasiness, and renders such behavior permissible under the auspices of manhood³⁴ By attributing behavior exclusively to T, narrators reify the chemical sexgendered framework that routinely exclude other trans(/)butch subjects from the “true-trans” label. It also renders the experiences of transbutches like myself, who became *more* emotional and cried *more* often when first on T, unthinkable, demanding instead strict adherence to a masculinizing man(-)date, in which the external appearance associated with cis, normative manhood must be accompanied by a so-called masculine personality.

Because of this 1:1 association between T-taking and entrance to manhood, the figure of the butch-on-T becomes questionable and even impossible: an oxymoron both by trans-exclusionary and trans-centered narratives. Because T is both necessary and sufficient to inaugurate transition, to bring in a variety of masculinized traits (or the frame through which to find them) the “butch woman” thus cannot and must not use it, for fear that she will lose the marker “woman” butches have so recently laid claim to. T is seen as a *beyond-butch* possibility, to the extent that butches like the anonymous blogger at *Butch Wonders*, with some embarrassment, feel emasculated by fellow women if those women take T, despite that they both take pleasure in butchness.³⁵ Rather than simply another element of butch experience, T acts as an indicator of

³² Coogan, Kelly. “Fleshy Specificity: (Re)Considering Transsexual Subjects in Lesbian Communities .” *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1-2, 2006, pp. 17–41., doi:10.1300/j155v10n01_02. p. 34.

³³ Coogan, 34.

³⁴ The converse — wherein trans women are expected and demanded to diminish their sexualities while on E/“becoming women,” is also true. See Thom, Kai Cheng. “How Trans Women Are Reclaiming Their Orgasms.” *BuzzFeed*, BuzzFeed, 17 Apr. 2016, www.buzzfeed.com/kaichengthom/the-search-for-trans-womens-orgasms.

³⁵ “Reflections on Testosterone and Female Masculinity.” *Butch Wonders*, 3 Sept. 2015, www.butchwonders.com/blog/reflections-on-testosterone-and-female-masculinity.

trans-discovery, a method of gender-change: When Rae Spoon first saw trans men on T, they felt “choice c[o]me crashing in like a great wave” (GF129). With the discovery of T and thus of trans manhood, came the discovery that their body could still be amended; they could go “further” than “simply dressing masculine” and into “true”-transness (GF129). Their girlfriend, standing in for the anti-butcheer crowd, immediately chastises them, representing a butcheer restriction that narrators like Coyote replicates in their staunch and vocal refusal of T in order to retain butcheer legibility. In this formulation, refusal of T “makes” a butcheer woman, and discovery of T as a path to possibility and comfort “makes” a transmasculine person or trans man: thus, there is no possible transbutcheer on T, one either *is* transitioning or *isn't*. One is either moving linearly toward manhood (and, as we will see in the following section, “cure”), or staying put forever.

Lesbian/queer couples can also see their legitimacy challenged if a member begins taking T, as Maggie Nelson voices in her “auto-theoretical” text *The Argonauts*. Harry Dodge, Nelson’s husband, is a butcheer on T who approaches body modification with a transbutcheer ethos, resisting “resolution” in “a culture frantic for [it]” (ARG96). Still, Nelson fears the implications of Harry taking T, specifically for her own perceived sexuality — would she become a “straight lady” now that “straight ladies [were] hot for Harry” (ARG19). Nelson fears Harry’s very *character* changing, in line with previously-mentioned personality changes attributed to hormones, namely that he will personally change as his body does (ARG19; 95-96). Her fears reflect perhaps the greatest concern related to T in/and identity development: not knowing when the “butcheer to trans” (in this case, “butcheer to man”) moment precisely occurs, or whether or not all butcheers do indeed occupy a “different category” entirely from trans men at all, theoretically placing the lesbianism

of those in relationships now-transitioning people into question.³⁶ Under a binary hormonal regime, the potential for trans(/)butch similarity and alliance *without* sameness is stripped as T is bound inextricably to manhood. This framing cannot possibly do justice to the ever-shifting and ever-becoming relationships we have with ourselves, our partners, and our communities, just as the words “testosterone” and “estrogen” alone cannot begin to articulate the impacts of hormones on our bodyminds.

T can adapt to changing conceptions of male-man-masculinity, thereby reducing a variety of trans(/)butch experiences, refusals, and desires to indicators of binary position, asking: “are you a butch (woman) or trans (man)?” It uses the possibility of (medically-approved) transition to further limit the scope of the gender-possible rather than expand it. For Spoon, T was a representation of post-butch possibility that became necessary to “correct-transness,” and for their then-girlfriend, as well as narrator Coyote, it became a thing to reject in the preservation of butchness. For David Harrison and Harry Dodge, T was a means of both securing (for Harrison) and troubling (for Dodge) stable understandings of sexual identity across gender; Harrison used T’s embodied results as a way to prove his (gay) manhood while Dodge, in using T to pass-through gender threw his and Maggie Nelson’s “queer visibility” into jeopardy. In all cases, struggles around T and its sexgendered implications rely on and reaffirm T’s tightly-bound association with (and creation of) “male-masculine-manhood,” placing it, and its so-called opposite, estrogen, as binary conduits to “real” sexgender in the cultural imagination.

To challenge this, we must attack sexual dimorphism and chemical determinism as a simple explanation for behavior and appearance in people of all genders, so as to ultimately displace

³⁶ “Reflections on Testosterone and Female Masculinity,” 2015.

the binary map sexgender attempts to make of our bodies. Rather than standing as an alternative or challenge to butchness, *or* a confirmation of transness (or “cure” for dysphoria), consider alternate possibilities for T: not as cure but as disruption. How can we use T to hack gender — cracking and reshaping interpretive codes, and in terms of cutting — hacking apart — the pieces of physical, psychological, and social life meant to add up to binary existence (ARG96)? Before we do so, we must understand the ideology that this new approach to T would disrupt, founded in perhaps the most dangerous form of testosterone symbolism. That is, T as “cure” for dysphoric pathology, fix for illness rather than creation of new gender possibilities. In the following section, I will look toward an explicitly-cure-focused narrative which likens a return to T — return to becoming-manhhood — to recovery from anorexia. In this case, healthy subjectivity and adherence to “prescribed” sexgender become narratively interchangeable; gender-sanity a singular mandate.

*

First, I was going to stop my “very-low-dose” after the mastectomy. I didn’t. I upped my dose, taking half what the “standard” (trans man) patient takes. I took a break while abroad, finding that — contrary to everything I had ever been told — T was actually making me more emotionally unstable, more prone to spontaneous, tearful outbursts that stopped immediately when I put T on pause. When I came home, and through my junior year of college, I picked T back up again. I again considered stopping after my hysterectomy. I had, after all, kept my ovaries. But I continued.

Several months ago, I formally upped my dose to 3/4 the standard. Now, since having begun this thesis, I'm newly on 4/4. Overall, I have been on T far longer than I ever anticipated. I still use the gel; my fear of injections precludes me from switching.

Have I become *more* trans? If I have, was the T a cause or an effect of that movement, or both? Can body chemistry even earn such a designation, and when it does, where does all the butchness go? If anything, I feel butcher than I was before, not necessarily transer. Far from the result of new chemicals, my increasing confidence in my own transbutchnessness is largely the cause and result of an affirming community, an increasingly-aware social milieu, and the pursuit of knowledge that has, among other things, resulted in this thesis.

I do feel more of an intimate connection between my gender, sexuality, and testosterone than I do between the former two and my surgeries. My mastectomy and hysterectomy were about making my life livable, while T is about my gender-sexual presentation and my relationships — a choice based in aesthetic preference. T gives me the opportunity to trans, as a verb, butchness. To queer my relationships to butch lesbianism and to “transition.” It is neither an example of flight nor a sign of deficit, but instead a site of play. Far from inaugurate a teleological transition, T transitions with me, an ever-reshaping tool. I, like other transbutches, can and should view T as another possibility available to us as gender-crossers, not a signal of a transnormative turn in our stories, nor simply as “medicine” to correct wrong-embodiment.

Just as I feel most butch when considering how I turn butchness on its head, I find my T-play reaffirming in its destabilization of my transness. Yes, I've been on T for years now; yes, I still look like this; no, I don't plan to go "further," be a man.

I'm neither your before nor your after, I'm transitioning to nothing, I'm in the middle. I am not disappearing but I am not here. I'm "dysphoric" and gender-experimental. I take testosterone because I feel like it, have surgeries because life without them is no-life. I do none of it with a gender-goal in mind. Again, *nothing*.

Testosterone-As-Cure: Kyle Lukoff

The most well-circulated understanding of transness is the wrong-body narrative, in which one's internal sense of binarily-conforming gender is at odds with one's "birth sex," and this mismatch is a pathology treatable by medicine. With the help of the doctor, this mismatched bodymind can attain a normal, healthy relationship to binary sexgender and (in/while doing so) restore "sanity" — that is, function in a cisheteronormative culture. This narrative demands a biological essentialism (that there are certain "right" sexgendered bodies requiring hormones and surgery to achieve) that pathologizes non-adherence to the sexgender binary as a sickness in need of treatment. Testosterone, prescribed as medication, acts as curative of pains at the nexus of embodiment and psyche, of practice and presentation. The fact that it is only submission to medical authorities that enables the emergence of desired sexgendered traits reaffirms the doctor as a site of medical authority — upholding the ideology of cure more broadly. To understand the belief in testosterone as uniform dysphoria-cure, I will be focusing on one short narrative as an example of the inextricability of psychosocial-disability cure stories and testosterone (dysphoria-cure) stories. How does this framing of dysphoria as (parallel to and the result of) other "mental illness" further reinforce the system I discussed last section, in which transness is the pursuit of an opposite side of a chemical binary? In what ways, too, do these shared narratives naturalize the power of the medical industry over the making of trans bodies and ensure the continuation of hegemonic transmedical narratives?

In his essay *Taking Up Space*, Kyle Lukoff discusses his experience with dysphoria and disordered eating: what was an adolescent struggle returned in his early hormonal transition, primarily due to his then-ambiguous gender presentation(GE122-127). Having had anorexia as a

teen, Lukoff begins starving himself once more early in his adult transition, considering this choice an unconscious response to the demand for trans people to disappear. It also functions as an attempt to counteract the unwanted attention he receives, first can't quite pass as a "ma'am" or a "sir" (GO123). By no means exclusive to Lukoff, reactive self-starvation in the face of uncontrollable first-puberty³⁷ — growing breasts, starting one's period, gaining unwanted curves — occurs in a number of transmasculine subjects, including narrator Rae Spoon.^{38 39} On (GF145), Spoon discusses refusal of food as refusal of pubescent womaning, and thus, as retreat into a less-gendered past.

I felt better huddled inside my body like it contained a secret place that I could control. *People started to tell me that I was becoming a woman, but I knew that that was just on the outside*; inside, I was going to stay the same: ambivalent to the confusing expectations that surrounded me.

In the absence of T, controlling his food intake becomes a bid to make his externality match their internal experience, and to exercise an otherwise-impossible degree of bodily autonomy. This is particularly true for Lukoff in the face of others' perceptions of him as gender non-conforming. In early transition he is visibly neither/nor, and thus must become a size zero — nothing at all, an invisible and even unmarked subject. This he considers preferable to unambiguous ambiguity.

Although he presents a familiar narrative arc of eating disorder descent and ultimate recovery,

³⁷ Chosen hormone administration is referred to as "second puberty," a tongue-in-cheek shorthand for the anachronistic acne, crackling voice, change in sex drive, and other uncomfortable adolescent issues afflicting transitioning adults.

³⁸ See Pfeffer, Carla A. "Bodies in Relation—Bodies in Transition: Lesbian Partners of Trans Men and Body Image." *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2008, pp. 325–345., doi:10.1080/10894160802278184.

³⁹ If in need of further resources, see "TFED: Trans Folx Fighting Eating Disorders." *T-Fed*, www.transfolxfightingeds.org/home, unmatched in their provision of resources, community, and consciousness-raising about disordered eating at the nexus of multiple marginalities.

Lukoff subverts tired clichés of “female socialization” exclusively causing eating disorders: while these impossible expectations for women influenced his adolescent struggles, it was precisely being regarded as an illegitimate *man* that heralded his anorexia’s return. Rather than frame his anorexia as simply a drive to look like a model or other unattainable woman-image, Lukoff transforms it into a signifier of his true-trans status, an unwise and medically-unauthorized bid to cure his feminizing body from which medicine needed to save him. Following this, it is unsurprising that he pairs the real-manhood associated with testosterone use with the recovery of his body, weight gain and transition working in tandem to normalize what was once unhealthy.

Lukoff experiences institutionalization for his eating disorder, an experience which, to his initial surprise, did not itself serve as his “salvation” (GO127). However, while in treatment, he acquires the tools (later including testosterone) to recover himself from a body strayed off of trans-course, and returning to the trans-course ends up being an active approach to the so-called salvation the institution denied him. As he restores weight in the hospital, however, Lukoff also restores the brash personality (a trait represented by the aforementioned references to testosterone-fueled energy and aggression) he desperately wanted to make disappear with the rest of himself. As he recovers, he also recovers his desired gender, embracing masculinized traits even through feminized therapeutic processes like art therapy (GO127). While regaining his personality, he acquiesces to his “therapeutic snack” as well as the demands “not to disclose” his trans status to other patients (GO127). Lukoff obtains “real manhood” in recovery by being forced stealth and getting “back up to a size 30 in mens’ pants” (GO127). A parallel even emerges between hormones and food: while testosterone is the substance that will make a man of him, food is the drug that will return him to mens’ sized clothing, that will work alongside the hormones to facili-

tate his passing. While T supposedly increases his aggression and amplifies his appetite, recovery trains him in how to figure out “[his] way in the world as a man,” taking up space rather than shrinking from it. In both the act of hormone and food-compliance and in the visible impacts each have, Lukoff illustrates resistance to T as a trans man as “sick,” and compliance to it “well” and deserving of recognition and reward.

Thus, hormones become necessary to trans survival while anathema to lesbian experience as long as trans is a sickness to be treated and cured. Lukoff, in his pursuit of the ideal, recovered, healthy body, also pursues the "correctly-gendered" body, which becomes a static and attainable goal to reach through medical treatment. With the help of the medical system, Lukoff's disordered body relationship is both literally and figuratively put back in order; back on a straightened path toward normative manhood and toward a bodymind relation deemed safe and sane. Lukoff, through T-nourishment, enacts a medical compliance that reifies T as cure, and as necessary inventor of the healthy, desirable trans life.

*

Ending I:

Every day I have a conversation with my body

that goes like this:

I take off my shirt and lean forward into the mirror. I see a slightly-reddened chest with a vague brownish cast that could just as easily be a shadow. This is the place where hair might be. If I lean closely enough, I can see individual strands notably darker and thicker than the standard-issue dose of colorless fuzz I've always had. It matches the light dusting on my upper-lip, the significance of which I have given up on trying to accurately gauge, knowing that — what-

ever I observe about my body —I will doubtless interpret it to fit the narrative of insufficiency chosen for me by forces beyond my control, as I always have. (As I did when years “on estrogen” produced a pair of small breasts that destroyed my adolescent psyche.)

What I see is mostly nothing, a very present absence. It’s an absence that asks of me, what do you want (to) present? I don’t know how to answer the question, don’t know what the butch thing to want out of transness is, don’t know if I’m the right sort of body with the right sort of wants to ask for things like chest hair, facial hair, not even sure that, if I did grow all these things, they’d do what I wanted for my body — or whether, one day, I would believe I had never really wanted them in the first place.

I tuck my chin into my neck and look down at my chest, more sensitive now when I run my hand against the grain, since there is now a light grain against which it can run. The hair is most prominent on and around my mastectomy scars, as is the case for many of us (who ever that is) (I don’t know why). After my shower I check my chest and upper lip again, try to figure out what I’m manifesting. I think about the teenage boy whose clothes I buy at the department store, examining something nascent and nameless in the mirror. When did this person become in-excess of cisness? Must I wait until my hair and voice get thicker before taking up that label? Or, is this daily ritual — not the administration of hormones itself, but this compulsive search for evidence —itself evidence enough?

Sometimes I feel like being a transbutch, at least for me, is having to make these sorts of decisions — to determine my own limits, to critique relentlessly the reasons that I set them here or there. I am playful, and I am glad to use T as more than just another inevitable part of a regimen of medication. But this relationship carries with it an uncertainty that I have learned my

whole life to avoid. In resisting normative T-stories, I must accept the discomfort I feel when I confront the scariest part about perpetually-becoming: the possibility that I might become contra to what I am today. There is nothing I can do about the person I don't know if and when I will become, except rub another four pumps of concentrated, ethanol-smelling testosterone gel across my back.

*

Ending 2:

My T, a gel, smells sharply of alcohol and burns if it touches an unfortunate hangnail or invisible cut. Its effects take longer to manifest than injections. Unlike shots — administered weekly or biweekly — I rub the gel into my back every day. I spray my vanilla body mist in the air when I'm done, wash my hands as the smell rains down on me.

When my blood test came back teenage boy, I felt a strange pleasure, because my body had done the strange thing I had told it to. Instead of screaming at a brick wall, I felt I had entered some sort of dialogue with the hormone, as if it was finally willing to play with me. Finally, this technology of transition is at my mercy.

Every night I run my hands down the flat planes of my chest, feeling pinpricks where my fingertips touch bright-red follicles. When I look closely, I see little specks of brown inside them; more often, I can feel them when I push against the grain. Similar hairs dot my chin and even more so, my upper lip. I don't know how I feel about any of this. When I lean into my mirror late at night, I don't know what or who I'm looking for.

I have a feeling that, whoever they are, they change a little every day.

Trans Manhood, Emerging Through Lesbianism

Transbutch stories of “coming to terms” are often placed in stages of outness, stages of “trueness” in accordance with (even while in defiance of) transmedical tropes). They begin with a mis(s)-identification, often (out of ignorance) as “just a lesbian,” by uninformed others and by oneself: in Mario Martino’s case, for example, lesbianism was simply the only language through which gender non-conformity could be understood. However, the mere use of terms like “misidentification” raises questions about the nature of butchness as it relates to transness: if trans identity comes after lesbianism, does this make trans a more “progressive,” advanced identifier? Are all butches simply “not trans yet”? How is it that “the lesbian...[defines] who is a lesbian,” if, according to this framing, some who take up the label might actually not be lesbians at all (PM34)? Is it really that butches are “actually trans,” or are trans people mere “mistaken butches”?

Why are the stakes so high, and why is it so imperative we pick a side?

The trans (or) butch argument stems from an essentialist impulse, the belief that identity to be a teleological process of self-discovery: each successive identity is a step closer to deep-down Truth. The language we use to describe transness and butchness also reinforces this, the words “just butch” in comparison to trans identity imply butchness to be merely a “repressed” version of the advanced, trans self, reinforced by the separation of medically-approved dysphoria as especially severe compared to other body-anguish. At the same time, these butches who resent what they perceive as mass-exodus weaponize truly problematic teleological rhetorics in order to

claim that increasing numbers of trans people is due to brainwashing, rather than increased material and cultural access to transness as a practice, genre, and even diagnosis.

Following this, each new identity is conceptualized as definitively replacing the “old,” such that the decision to cross into manhood from butchness is not only an act of growth but of divorce. Again, we see essentialism at work — if we are trans, we must have been born that way, and thus the appearance of butchness must have been a “mistake.” Some narrators find this to be true for them, framing their identities as indeed past, even remarking (I first wrote “remaking”) that their erstwhile butchness was merely transness “in denial” (GO94). However, a collective over-reliance on this story is dangerous to people of all genders and points in self-identification, because it not only stigmatizes “wrongness” but creates the possibility for it. That is, it renders identity into something one can, eventually, “get right” — implying that there’s an inner truth it is our job to realize and match.

In the two narratives I consider here, Mario Martino’s and Rae Spoon’s, we see an identificatory reality far more complex than inner-truth discovery, one mediated by community belonging, social pressure, and access to language. This forces us to problematize the idea that there is a single lesbian or trans narrative that rings truer than all the others, or that there are specific feelings, experiences, and desires exclusive to one group or the other. In Mario Martino’s case, associations with lesbianism were the result of a miseducated public around him; the identity was never salient and thus abandoned entirely, along with his false-womanhood. In Spoon’s case, however, butchness turning to trans manhood was only the beginning of the story, and their ultimate retirement from gender complicates narratives of progress *and* of “detransition.”

Mario Martino consistently places his transness in close proximity and positive contrast to perceived-queerness; transness, for him, is a path to and act of “getting better”. He places his introduction to queerness and his introduction to transness mere paragraphs apart, in the context of a traumatic experience of puberty also common among transbutch life narratives. ““He’s a queer,”” two of his classmates say of another boy (E33) It is only later that Martino learns what “queer” means, according to his classmate: ““someone who plays with himself or loves another boy[,] instead of loving a girl, which is normal”” (E33) While Martino presents this statement ambivalently, he does so mostly in relation to his own potential queerness. He wonders if he is “queer in reverse recognizing what could be called “similar difference” between himself and the boy (E33). Although the boy (if even actually gay) is unlike Martino, he is compelled to identify with him in the absence of other options.

This changes upon Martino’s first introduction to transness, via Christine Jorgensen’s transition, at age fifteen — years after the former scene but near to it in the text. Jorgensen provides Martino access to the language of transness, and thus, a path to actionable medical intervention. Jorgensen’s narrative reached a wide international audience, and circulated through both the news and through book she published in 1967: these provided Martino his ultimate model for what normative transness could be (E142). Martino did not know he was possible until seeing Jorgensen’s story, and grew quickly to believe — and narrate — himself as *only* possible with the usage of biomedical intervention that Jorgensen did. This new information produced the narrative that became his life, and its placement near a false-connection with queerness also reflects Martino’s thankfulness that the queer narrative did not become his own, that he had instead learned *how* to want to be a man. It was only *after* learning Jorgensen’s story that Martino began

a ritual “nightly prayer...[to] be changed into the man [he] knew [he] was meant to be” (E34). Now, he had a concrete object to pray for, a goal to work towards; his prayer of petition required the language through which to express his desires. Prior to language-access — hermeneutic justice — Martino was marked as a little girl who wanted to be a boy, trapped by the verb “to want,” unable to achieve a greater sense of “realness.” This also enables him to resist a co-worker’s pressure to enter what amounts to conversion “therapy” for a nonexistent queerness, saying “I don’t want to change my feelings, I want to change my body,” (E86). Here, we see both the negative and positive impacts of Martino’s access to Jorgensen’s narrative: while Martino is able to resist false assumptions with the knowledge that an alternative narrative is possible, this narrative also produces a binary between the language of lesbianism and the language of transness which remains in force today.

Throughout his relationships, Martino must continuously denounce assumptions that he is a lesbian; he does so to assert both his manhood and his (and his relationships’) heterosexuality in the face of presumed lesbianism. Martino asserts his straightness through his manhood and his manhood through his straightness, invoking his girlfriends’ false presumptions of his queerness in order to deny them in/as his autobiography. Only aware of butchness as language for people who look and behave like Martino, his then-girlfriend, Louise, says “‘you wear mens’ clothing and short hair, you tell me that you’re falling in love with me — yet say you’re not a lesbian’” (E91). He argues that he doesn’t feel like a lesbian, “‘especially in the kip’” — transness and lesbianism can be separated by “feeling,” and correct terminology, to Martino, is all that is necessary to explain the truth of who he is: a straight man in a state of “pre-straightness,” awaiting medical authorization (E91). This is further confirmed by his citation of Christine Jor-

gensen's transition in explaining his gender to another girlfriend, Helga (E99). Lesbianism and transness are internal, unchanging, mutually exclusive sensations to him, and despite surface-level similarities (he gives his girlfriend Becky *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall, a semi-autobiographical transbutch novel, as a means of helping her understand their relationship) his internal sense of manhood remains constant and in demand of action, while Hall's characters' do not feel the same (E114-115). Loving Becky "as a woman" (that is, how he conceives of his pre-transition appearance) is something to be *settled for*; his and Becky's relationship's "resemblance to lesbianism" was the mere result of his "lack of proper organs" (E116).

Martino's story is not one of a lesbian turning trans, but of a trans person overcoming others' false perceptions. Given the absence of trans men's narratives surrounding Martino, he was encouraged to resign [him]self to being a lesbian" as a favorable alternative to surgery, even doing his transition; while still pathological, "lesbian" was more legible than transness (E192). It is framed as a way of "settling" between genders by outsiders, a condition framed as liminal and even pathetic by Martino, committed to a narrative of gender and sexual progress. In his mind, there is a key internal difference between lesbians and trans men that Martino believes distinguishes him from the former; while lesbians "fit the psychological mold of 'woman,'" he himself, an intrinsic man, never could (E114). In light of this, the anatomy that "womans" him (and thus, lesbians him) is evidence of defective manhood fixable by transness — an unequivocal mistake he is anxious to get rid of (E116). Martino's narrative is thus not one of butchness-turned-transness, but of a man escaping a litany of imposed judgements at odds not only with his present experience but with his intrinsic character.

Unlike Martino, who discovered his manhood in childhood by individually discovering binary transness, Rae Spoon “decided to identify as a man” when “[they were] twenty and *found out* [through others] *that gender was an option*” [emphasis mine] (GF 134). This option-based identification will continue to figure strongly throughout Spoon’s narrative, and the new transnesses they discover will continue expanding the horizons of the possible, leading them not to deep-down truth but into greater peace. Spoon’s first discovery of transness was, like Martino’s, through the sudden presence of trans narratives in their life — but while Martino found transness without a community, Spoon saw in transness a valuable community-potential they continue to carry today. Martino’s secreted newspapers documenting Jorgensen’s journey provided him a self-invention blueprint, but he read the papers alone — an apt metaphor for the individualized conception of dysphoria he advances) (E34). For Spoon, on the other hand, it was friendships with trans men and others that made this possible, and allowed them to decide for the time that “the narrative [of manhood] seemed to fit” them (GF134). Though they later realized this was not their whole story, the narrative did help them to understand their bodily discomfort, and more than that, provided an alternative to the girlhood and later lesbianism that disowned them.

At first, Spoon is materially limited by a lack of appropriate terminology; an issue evident in their “pre-trans” youth and in their initial assumption of trans manhood. As a child, Spoon was not “proto-trans” but “girl failure;” while a tomboy, even this was subject to derision and restriction by their extremist Christian parents (GF 31). In school, they were positioned not as a person with an identity but rather as in possession of a gender-absence, even the scraps of someone else’s history (“I used to want to be a boy, too” said a girl to them in middle

school) (GF32). When they first discover their lesbianism, they do so alone: secreting lesbian magazines and feeling relieved to find butches “wearing mens’ clothes like [them]” (GF102). Yet, even in “lesbian spaces,” Spoon faces constant accusations of being not-woman-enough. Upon first seeing a trans man’s bound chest, Spoon asks a then-girlfriend, Cora, “I wonder how Jeremiah gets his chest so flat? [...] I didn’t know that I could [bind] until I saw it” (GF118). Cora responds with disgust at the thought, asking Spoon, “Besides, you’re not a boy, are you?” (GF118). No, as it turns out, Spoon is not a boy — but for a time, they must be, because they do not believe that “they” is practical. Instead, they waver at the tense center of the “border wars,” identifying alongside lesbianism even while it excludes the future they need, moving into a manhood they cannot grasp when it doesn’t work, yet without language or confirmation that a trans future belongs to them.

As it turns out, a trans future *did* belong to Spoon, but it was not the confirmed, unhesitating crossing to manhood that they initially anticipated and that Martino engaged in. Unlike Martino, who knew with certainty that he was not a lesbian after being dissatisfied with lesbian social spaces, Spoon was forced to confront that lesbians were not satisfied with *them* (GF116-117). Spoon, then, simply sought out a friend group in which they were wanted and heard, unlike Martino, who understood their identity prior to forming a social group around it. They even temporarily believe in a trans essentialism, likely as a way of explaining their exclusion from “lesbian spaces;” while never altering their body medically: they were suspicious of gender non-conforming trans people and dismissed non-conforming (non-confirming) identification. Becoming a gender-correct man (and adhering to a belief system in which this was a thing one could be), they hoped, would compensate from years of being too masculine for the lesbians,

yet never “the right kind of gay,” for cis man potential partners, either (GF117). Yet, their initial plan to overcome perceived “gender failure” through passable, legible, successful manhood was thwarted. Instead of attempting to fit a mold from which even the most compliant cis men spill, Spoon responded to a constant stream of transphobia from people of all genders by renouncing gender entirely — understanding that there were no real genders, that they were chasing an empty promise.

The greatest difference between Martino’s and Spoon’s respective stories is their relationship (or lack thereof) with prior lesbian community and subsequent relationship with trans community. While Martino never sought nor took part in queer social life — quite the contrary, he eschewed any relationship to queerness — Spoon attempted to occupy queernesses and transnesses that they were not granted admission to. While both of their stories suggest lesbianism as a phase to shed in favor of transness, their stories also expose the choice to transition as far more complicated than mere *flight*. Martino’s is, as his memoir suggests, an “emergence” — his transness comes to the surface as soon as others — specifically, the medical industry — choose to recognize it; once this happens, he is able to organize community spaces for others like himself. Neither of the narratives I discuss here imply a feeling of loss at leaving lesbian communities, a sense felt by narrators MainelyButch, S. Bear Bergman, and Ivan Coyote.

Not only do community and language greatly influence Martino’s and Spoon’s respective gender decisions, these choices in language and community are indicative of underlying ideological differences between their approaches to gender. Martino’s approach undoubtedly places transition as a forward movement: for him, it is a sign of progress from false identity to real self. The medical process of transition is for Martino a direct pathway to normalcy, improved quality of

life, and, yes, heterosexuality. For Spoon, however, the initial “progress” of transition, borne of rejection, also facilitates the realization of its own insufficiency: rather than a gradual march toward freedom, transition can just as easily be a move from one set of expectations to another. Spoon finds liberation not in a linear movement away from their assigned sexgender, but in a gradual acceptance that there is no improved gender or sexuality: there is the possibility of living in its absence, of transitioning to nothing at all.

*

Unlike many butches, I did not equivocate as to whether or not I would choose top surgery. I began pursuing it from the moment I reached adulthood. Once I got the green light, it was a non-question. I had no fear of regret. In “true trans” form, I wanted my breasts gone since before I could conceive of it as an option. This desire was amplified by my past, premature entry into puberty — not an affront because of some deep-seated desire to take off my shirt, but rather because my body became to exceed itself. It was, like/with hegemonic sexgender, outside my control: growing, bleeding, all without my consent. In this way, though I do not directly connect my mastectomy and later hysterectomy to my gender(lessness), I connect both to my commitment to bodymind self-determination, whose auspices extend from gender, to sex, to body, to mind, to everything.

This experience has everything to do with the order in which I obtained my current labels. I was consciously trans before I was a lesbian, although I have been a lesbian longer than I have been trans. Of course, I knew of lesbianism before I knew that nonbinariness existed, but I learned of the concept of transitioning genders and the concept of gayness at around the same time. I have lesbian and bi family members, but I recall my first introduction to lesbianism as

facilitated by media. My parents were watching a movie with a lesbian wedding scene, and they told me that two girls were getting married, I remember demanding, "you can do that?" breathless with excitement, and they said yes, I could. I did not have the aversion or disgust toward terms like "lesbian" that others describe being inculcated with as kids (I was actually the person in fifth grade who explained to several startled peers what a lesbian was one morning at the lockers) although I did retain deep-seated internalized homo/trans-phobia.

My great-aunt also came out as a trans woman when I was in elementary school. I believed, like many, that transness only existed in terms of two binary genders. This changed only after I was exposed, online, to nonbinariness (or genderqueerness — in hindsight I can't remember which term was *en vogue* in the corner of the internet I occupied in 2011). I was eleven, turning twelve when I became active on the site, browsing a majority-fandom community of blogs but increasingly consuming "social justice" content, which consisted of anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-cisheterosexist, and anti-ableist informational posts. They were basic, and there are probably plenty of twelve-year-olds today who would find the messages I got about transness antiquated or simplistic. At the time, "sex \neq gender" and "biology \neq identity" was revolutionary to me, who had accepted as common sense that I had no choice but to be a female-girl-woman.

Although deeply, necessarily closeted in "real life" while attending Catholic school, the solidity of my queerness only increased with online engagement. I began critically examining my relationship to gender, re-collecting my past like the narrators I examine, and like I am meta-narrating now. At fourteen, I first stumbled upon Judith Butler, and what little of *Gender Trouble* I could actually comprehend at the time sent my world spinning. I *undid* my erroneous assumption that the construction of gender was merely the "other" of a concrete "sex". Gender was a subjek-

tive process, not a static fact. I was once a girl — and I maintain that yes, I used to be a girl, although that girlhood was the result of a closed and coerced choice — and I studied how not to be. I acquired with language a refusal to woman.

For the last decade, I have called myself 1) bicurious (a term I learned from *Glee*) 2) asexual (hetero) 3) asexual (pan) 4) asexual (grey-pan) 5) asexual (gay) 6) gay 7) lesbian. I don't believe in "born this way" rhetoric, but I do think that "gay/lesbian" is the only thing I've really been for as long as I can remember. I did not begin identifying with lesbianism until I was eighteen, around the time I was diagnosed with "gender dysphoria," and mere months before beginning a low dose of testosterone gel. I solidified my lesbianism while pursuing top surgery, and later a hysterectomy. I continue to use testosterone, check my upper lip for fuzz for reasons I can't quite articulate, not knowing quite what I wish (not) to see.

To me, trans identification feels like a journey I will be on for the rest of my life. Maybe my gender will change, maybe I will become acquainted with words that do not yet exist, or make them. My gender (as/in terms of the language I use for it) has changed as a result of my exposure, study, relationships, and self-examination. My lesbianism, though, feels more like a "coming home." Transness emerged through my bodymind relationship, from my contact with trans theory and thought. Lesbianism, though — that seemed like something that waited years for me to grasp onto, although it was always in my reach. I can never remember *not* feeling this thing, living this lesbian life — I remember living life under the yoke of compulsory heterosexuality⁴⁰, and then finally realizing I could throw it off.

⁴⁰ I believed I was incapable of love and destined to live/die alone, unless I taught myself how to have crushes on boys and thus "doom" myself to be the wife of a future husband.

BUTCHNESS IN CONTEXT

At the Bar and In the Clinic

As sexuality turned from a thing one *did* to a thing one *was*, according to medical discourse, the nineteenth century saw the proliferation of new nosological categories for deviance. For queer people, this meant the rise of “gender inversion” as a way of understanding what would later be called “homosexuality.” Believers in inversion like Havelock Ellis believed that non-normative sexual orientation was both indication and result of non-normative gender; for example true lesbianism indicated the lesbian’s “masculine nature” belying a “female” body.¹ Gender deviance was inextricable from sexual deviance; Ellis even referred to “lesbian transvestites” in his writing.² ³ In all cases, in/correct sexuality and gender were biological problems to be medically treated. The healthy *female* subject was necessarily straight (that is, necessarily the “passive” sexual partner to a heterosexual man); cis sexgender and straight sexuality were inseparable. By the early twentieth century, the terminology of inversion was being phased out in favor of “homosexuality” as a stable, legible diagnosis and social discourse.⁴ This quickly-calcifying pathological view of sexuality was codified in the DSM-I in 1952, the same year as Christine Jorgenson’s sex-reassignment surgery brought transness into public view.⁵ Some form of this di-

¹ Ellis, Havelock. *Sexual Inversion*. University Press, 1897. p. 251.

² Chauncey, George. “From Sexual Inversion To Homosexuality: Medicine And The Changing Conceptualization Of Female Deviance.” *Salmagundi*, no. 58/59, 1982, pp. 114–146., www.jstor.org/stable/40547567.

³ Chauncey, 127-128.

⁴ Drescher, Jack. “Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality.” *Behavioral sciences (Basel, Switzerland)* vol. 5,4 565-75. 4 Dec. 2015, doi:10.3390/bs5040565.

⁵ Drescher, 2015.

agnosis would remain in the DSM for almost three decades, although sexuality and gender would be increasingly conceptualized as distinct, though not entirely unrelated. "Homosexuality" was not removed from the DSM until 1973, when a 58% majority of APA psychiatrists voted in agreement with a prior decision by the APA Board of Trustees, under immense pressure from gay and Mad antipsychiatry activists.⁶

Since the 1970s, increasing separation of sexuality and gender have made them more akin to separate branches on a single tree, both in medical discourse (which currently diagnoses “gender dysphoria” but not queer sexual orientation) and in popular LGBTQ+ media and activism.⁷ Instead, both are framed as inborn and distinct: attraction to the class called “men” and/or “women” is unchanging and innate, as is the sense of which class, if any, one belongs to. This “soft pathologization,” as I call it, is an insidious reproduction of the sexgender binary and an example of medico-psychiatric discourses’s influence on “commonsense” thinking, and renders my term of interest, *transbutch*, an oxymoron. It is also roundly refuted with a look at historical queernesses; in our case, the butch/femme dynamic, whose downfall (expulsion) as a gender-subverting subculture was contemporaneous with increased depathologization efforts. In other words, the disconnection of gender-deviation and *non-heterosexuality* helped to rehabilitate the latter while reifying the former. The midcentury butch, meanwhile, was trans in genre if not in identity, performing a gender both alien and threatening to cisheteronormative society.

The butch, and their femme counterpart, primarily played out subversion of cisheterosexual expectations in lesbian bars. These key subcultural spaces were sites of trauma as well as joy

⁶ Drescher, Jack. “Queer Diagnoses: Parallels and Contrasts in the History of Homosexuality, Gender Variance, and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2010, pp. 427–460., doi: 10.1007/s10508-009-9531-5.

⁷ See graphic on p. 71.

for their occupants, and were as diverse as the communities that frequented them. Rather than attempt to give a survey of all or even most American lesbian bars of the mid-twentieth century – a project far outside the aims of this thesis — I am going to focus on the book *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, which covers the oral histories of butch and femme bar-goers from upstate New York and has since become a staple of that body of work considered “Lesbian History.” Far from representative of all lesbians of the time, *Boots* should be understood as just one frame through which to view a history of transbutchness, an example (but by no means a comprehensive one) of butchness, lesbianism, and gender, one as geographically and temporally-specific as the North American and predominantly-white stories I cite throughout this thesis. B/f practices, beliefs, and forms of embodiment can not and should not be pigeonholed on the basis of one book’s account of one community, and to homogenize “Lesbian History” this way would be to participate in a dangerously ahistorical project that denies the diversity of queer experience.

This, I admit, was my first instinct in approaching historical background to transbutchness. I entered digital lesbian spaces at around age seventeen, the time I began my undergraduate education. Though I had occupied queer digital spaces since my pre-teen years, I knew little history from before 2000, and had only the vaguest understanding of what a butch and femme were (“butches dress masculinely and femmes dress femininely”). In the version of lesbian history I received online, the liminality I engage with throughout this thesis was largely nonexistent; the bisexuality of historical butches *and* femmes was erased and no gender-crossing was going on.⁸ Not only is this inaccurate, but invokes a dangerous nostalgia that is today weaponized by transphobic and biphobic lesbians seeking stricter border control at the entrance to “female space.” To

⁸ Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky, and Madeline D. Davis. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: the History of a Lesbian Community*. Routledge, 2014. p. 996.

uphold this would be to uphold the very rhetorics that kept even nominally-cis butches on the outskirts of lesbianism!⁹ I know I cannot hope to provide a sufficient overview of bar culture in the short space I have here. Rather than attempt to provide an accurate survey of the general state of b/f bar culture, I will use several specific examples from *Boots* as ways to contextualize my in-depth discussion of later narratives and illustrate cultural characteristics that help set the stage for contemporary stories and conflicts. I do this while acknowledging that this is not, and never will be, the whole story — itself an elusive, illusive, allusive thing in continuous re-formation.

In the mid-twentieth century, bars were among the few sites in which social interaction and flirtation between lesbians was possible. Communities developed extensive safety mechanisms to ensure their continued use of the space, which contributed heavily to the delineation of butch and femme roles. However, the b/f role-play system was as erotic as it was functional, emphasizing and sexualizing chosen difference across similar bodies: this dual pleasure and function made b/f a popular and even requisite practice in many lesbian bar scenes. The precise origin of b/f culture is unclear, but it is likely traceable to Black gay and lesbian communities of the Harlem Renaissance, which white gays and lesbians entered as “tourists” in ever-increasing numbers. Through “tourism” and cultural extraction, white gays and lesbians became voyeurs and occasional participants in Harlem nightlife, associated with “primitivism, sensuality, and hypersexuality” consistent with anti-Black stereotypes.¹⁰ Race notwithstanding, butch/femme was a

⁹ Strongorcbutch, Eve. It Would Carry out from the Same Logics... 27 Aug. 2018, strongorcbutch.tumblr.com/post/177464030897/.

¹⁰ Heap, Chad C. *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*. University of Chicago Press, 2010. p. 273.

working-class culture, a fact which only further damned lesbians to ever “off-kilter” (inverted, deviant) femaleness, especially the more-financially-insecure butches.¹¹

Though roles themselves were not "set in stone," (butches and femmes could “flip” depending on their partner of the moment) in-role rules and stereotypes were rigid, with butches demanding others be “rough, tough, and ready” in order to “measure up” to their peers.¹² Butches were expected to take femme partners, often engaging in physical fights over them; both butches and femmes mimicked the behavior and styles of dress modeled by more seasoned community members for fear of being mocked or excluded.^{13 14} Even flirtation was as much a site of conflict as pleasure: with so many in a state of isolation, competition, especially between butches for femmes, was fierce; plagued with jealousy and infidelity.¹⁵ Butches were subjected to hypervisibility as the paradigmatic pathologized lesbians, the masculine-appearing “inverts” of Havelock Ellis’s writing. For their part, communities held a belief in *intrinsic* butchness: a butch “crossing over” could refer to disguising themselves in feminine clothing, covering their true (masculine) nature — a seeming contradiction to the aforementioned belief in butch/femme “flipping” and further evidence of the internal diversity of the bar scene(s).¹⁶ The result of choice, predisposition, or both, butchness was most clearly a survival strategy, deployed to protect all bar-goers. Butches acted as both victims and necessary perpetrators of the bulk of bar violence: straight men, espe-

¹¹ Femmes, more likely to “flip” and marry men, had greater access to funds than butches, who may have struggled keeping jobs, or only had access to low-paying professions. (Kennedy and Davis, 287-289).

¹² Kennedy and Davis, 280.

¹³ Kennedy and Davis, 492.

¹⁴ Kennedy and Davis, 495.

¹⁵ Kennedy and Davis, 732-734; 749.

¹⁶ Borich, Barrie Jean. “My Lesbian Husband.” On Butch and Femme: Compiled Readings. p.103.

cially the police, assaulted and arrested butches for cross-dressing (then a crime) and other perceived-infractions.¹⁷ The roughness required of butches in order to survive this assault reaffirmed a belief in butch pathology that lives alongside romanticized ideas of butch gallantry: charged with the care of femmes in their lives, butches just as easily “lash out bitterly at anyone who tries to get too close to them” (BAAN154). While the butch/femme dynamic brought relief and social connection to many lesbians, it was nonetheless a response to pain: both the externally-imposed pain of oppression and exclusion, and the internal replication of that treatment. The undoubtedly-joyful camaraderie lesbians experienced in these bars was counterbalanced by the pain inherent to a life of social exile — far from the romanticized “old school” past that pervades contemporary b/f revival discussions.¹⁸

In this light, the desire to return to the “good old days” seems perplexing. Even if such a return were formally initiated, a contemporary bar culture would differ vastly from the historically and geographically-contingent communities of the midcentury. However, some lesbians take a stance of reactionary nostalgia toward bar culture, grounded in anti-trans rhetorics. With the rise in medicalized gender-crossing, advocates for a return to classical b/f culture euphemize the return to an imagined “pre-trans” culture. They are suspicious of the rise in trans and nonbinary identification among those who, in their view, may have been butches in decades past. Convinced otherwise-butches are “fleeing” to transness, they decry what they believe to be easy access to hormones, surgeries, and the language of transness. Largely, these are TERFs, trans-exclusionary radical feminists; while the term specifically refers to the exclusion of trans women

¹⁷ Valbuena, Greeny V. “De-Segregating Attire: How Appearance Has Guided History.” *DePaul Journal of Women, Gender and the Law*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2018, <https://via.library.depaul.edu/jwgl/vol7/iss2/4>.

¹⁸ Kennedy and Davis, 284.

from the purview of “real-womanhood,” such exclusion can be found coupled with a hatred of trans(masculine) “defection” from femaleness. TERFism is a biological-essentialist ideology, drawing bright lines between sexgenders that must be maintained in order to maintain in-group “purity.” Following this, they refuse the legitimacy of gender-crossing, believing each individual to be beholden to the gender determinate of/determined by assigned sex. By this logic, the transmasculine person becomes a “butch in denial” despite that neither category is internally uniform enough to make even basic generalizations. The butch of the past is upheld as a prized relic by those convinced that she would today “defect” to transness. The existence of “passing women” — who lived “stealth,” full-time lives as men with forged legal documents and heterosexual relationships.^{19 20} Clearly, they were distinct from their lesbian counterparts in a divide “concretized by language,” yet existed contemporaneously with the butches whose legacy trans people supposedly tarnish.²¹

Certainly, many historical butch practices, including breast binding, resemble the practices used by trans(masculine) people today.²² Contemporary butches and transmasculine people may buy the same toiletries and clothes, and — despite ambient efforts at division — occupy the same friend groups. But to make an equivalence between trans and nonbinary people today and historical butches is inaccurate, as is making equivalences between the *butches* of today and those of 1950. Such variation exists within identities, especially across time and space, makes it impossible to definitively claim “flight” from one identity to another — who is and was counted

¹⁹ Kennedy and Davis, 498.

²⁰ Kennedy and Davis, 326.

²¹ Kennedy and Davis, 499-500.

²² Kennedy and Davis, 483.

as “butch” (or) “trans” in the first place? My white, educated, north american, trans-informed butchness bears only a vague likeness to the working-class stone butches I read about. I am more effeminate than most of them and (because) I have had access to surgical and hormonal intervention. (Older butches I see today sometimes recognize me, though I think I ruin the moment of stoic, nodded recognition with my tendency to grin and wave, limp-wristed, in response.) I do not dress or behave as though I fear immediate violence, because I do not. I have the space and time to play with gender with a fairly low level of fear, so I do — this will necessarily lend itself to a different butchness, a different transbutchness, than that of the *Boots* narrators and Leslie Feinberg himself. What those who long for a return to a mythic b/f past fail to recognize is that one’s occupation of a sexual or gendered identity is contingent on the social space in which it is adopted: a return to bar culture in the twenty-first century wouldn’t stop butches from “fleeing,” it would simply make butchness in a new form.

As we have seen, given the internal complexity of historical and ongoing trans(/)butchnesses, generalized calls to claim all past-butches as “trans” or all contemporary trans people as “butch” fall short. So do simple summations of “b/f culture,” particularly as an unqualified site of pleasure rather than a site of joy only amid frequent violence. Perpetuators of this narrative fail to acknowledge the material conditions and ideological context that informs identity-formation, as well as the presence or absence of identity-making language itself. It was not until Leslie Feinberg, a stone butch who falls under the big-tent of transbutch,²³ popularized the term “transgender” that it saw usage over “transsexual” or “transvestite.” It functioned not as a way of diag-

²³ More than enough much-needed scholarship has been done on Feinberg’s work, more generally on hir as an LGBTQ giant, and certainly on *Stone Butch Blues* for it to warrant extensive examination here, although it may be cited as an originator of the tropes that now work in concert to construct transbutch narratives.

nosing "deviant" embodiment but as an all-inclusive term for a diverse set of gender-crossers.

Feinberg did not simply seek to identify those who deviated from gendered norms but to use the term "transgender" to facilitate a class-based analysis of gendered hierarchy and the borders that reinforce it — a mode of analysis that should supersede questions of individual identification, yet not erase them.²⁴ With this in mind, we can look clear-eyed toward the transing — and expulsion — of butches in/from "lesbian space" starting in the 1960s, and the general rejection of b/f culture that followed. Butch was deemed "a deviant gender, a *transgender*, a gender not recognized as such culturally or sociologically" (BAAN65). Suddenly, we begin asking not "who would have been trans" and "who would have been butch" but rather, "what are the social conditions that lead for some to be cast outside the realm of cisness, and then brought back in? How did the butch go from trans-exile to stalwart female, and how will a knowledge of this history help establish genuine transgender (transbutch) solidarity?"

²⁴ See Feinberg, Leslie. "Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come." *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, Routledge, 2006, pp. 205–220.

Cultural Feminism & Female Separatism

1960s America was a site of radical feminist emergence. “Radical feminist” is a broad term used for a variety of political groups and ideologies with different beliefs and goals. Only some can be understood as direct forebears of the self-proclaimed “radical feminist” TERFs of today. Those who may be most easily counted as TERF forebears are better called “cultural feminists,” and had beliefs somewhat amenable to their conservative, heterosexual counterparts. Namely, they were deeply suspicious of sex as an act, and true-believers in sex as a construct. They were also fixated on ensuring the purity of their in-group spaces by rejecting ties with threatening Others.²⁵ They directed this Other-hatred toward b/f bargoers, especially the working-class lesbians of color (especially Black lesbians) who pioneered the supposedly “low-consciousness” (that is, “low-class”) subculture.^{26 27} Such rejection was worsened by pre-existing suspicions toward Black lesbians, who cultural feminists believed were more faithful to “the men of their race” than the “culture” of womanhood.²⁸²⁹ Deep-seated racist attitudes about hypersexuality and masculinity permeated lesbian cultural spaces, too, and resulted in the formation of not only a female-lesbian in-group, but one that was white and middle-class in behavior.³⁰ In line

²⁵ Willis, Ellen, et al. *The Essential Ellen Willis*. Edited by Nona Willis Aronowitz, University of Minnesota Press, 2014. pp. 56; 177

²⁶ Kennedy and Davis, 75.

²⁷Smith, Elizabeth A. “Butches, Femmes, and Feminists: The Politics of Lesbian Sexuality.” *NWSA Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1989, p. 403. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4315922.

²⁸ Taylor, 2017.

²⁹ See Anzaldúa, Gloria. “La Prieta.” *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. 1981. New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983.

³⁰ Khan, 272.

with the racist tropes I discussed earlier, the white-female-lesbian became the *true* woman, and the entrance of *any* masculinity and/or maleness was tantamount to invasion.

For cultural feminists, largely separatist in aim, vilifying and eroding all attachments of any kind to men or masculinity was an important part of the feminist project. One was to engage in the countercultural project of separating from men-maleness-masculinity (deemed synonymous) by pledging allegiance to womanhood in a world where “everybody now wants to be a man, or be with a man”(UB277). Indeed, cultural feminists considered themselves to be "refugees" from the outside world, with pseudo-nationalist³¹ leanings best seen in their discursive dehumanization of the outside Other. Sharon Stone describes this in her own experience with separatism: "[T]he lesbian separatist ideas that were so prevalent when I came out dictated that any lesbian worthy of the label didn't even think that men (we called them "gomers") were human. They were rumored to be some sort of frightening mutation."³² Support for men became support for the alien at the expense of the human. Allyship with, similarity between and attraction to men delegitimized a woman's commitment to the Cause, even if that allyship was with gay men. As Eve Sedgwick describes, exclusive social and political affiliation with womanhood was the ultimate barometer of true lesbianism, true “femaleness”:

in [the lesbian-separatist] framework, there were essentially no valid grounds of commonality between gay male and lesbian experience and identity; to the contrary, women-loving women and men-loving men must be at precisely opposite ends of the gender spectrum [...] [a] re-visioning, in female terms, of *same-sex desire as being at the very*

³¹ See Boyd, Nan Alamilla. “Bodies in Motion: Lesbian and Transsexual Histories.” *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, Routledge, London, 2013, pp. 420–433.

³² Stone, 104.

definitional center of each gender, rather than as occupying a cross-gender or liminal position between them.³³

Cultural feminists codified these assumptions with the publication of “The Woman-Identified-Woman” in 1972. They emphasized ideological and social commitment to women as a qualifier for lesbianism, rather than actual sexual attraction to women; lesbianism turned from “inverts” to “*especially-woman*,” rehabilitating lesbian access to normative gender (cisness). Femaleness was exclusive, inherent, and immutable, rendering the gender-inversion model of gay and lesbian subjectivity impossible, and any non-binary (literally) identification became a political betrayal. Early victims of “woman-identified” ire were butches, some of whom fled lesbianism not “toward transness” but instead simply to escape escalating hostility, including accusations of “male-identification” vilified as incompatible with a “female” values system³⁴. B/f role-playing was, as femme scholar Carol Queen describes, “purged”³⁵ in this turn toward militant androgyny, both for the aforementioned reason and because cultural feminists deemed b/f inappropriately (hetero-)sexual, and sex with men was considered traitorous and even limited and banned from feminist groups.³⁶ ³⁷ Further, being a butch or femme was in and of itself a gender(ed) identity, apparently rendered extraneous or even suspect when one’s identification

³³ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. University of California Press, 2008. pp. 36

³⁴ Willis, et al. 104

³⁵ Queen, Carol. “Why I Love Butch Women.” *On Butch and Femme: Compiled Readings*. pp. 5-6.

³⁶ A group called The Feminists instituted a rule that “no more than a third of their membership could be married or living with a man.” But how did they decide who was allowed to be with a man at a given time? Did another slot open up when one broke up? Did they rotate? How did they, internally, explain the logic of attempting to live completely apart from men yet defining their entire membership in terms of their (non)relationships with men?

³⁷ Willis, et al. 103

was to be woman, and woman exclusively. Accordingly, bisexuality was also condemned for its “male-identification,” even marked as a vehicle for social contagion.³⁸ With the start of the AIDS epidemic, belief in male “social contagion” turned literal: bisexual women were falsely accused of spreading the illness by (literally) consorting with the enemy.³⁹ Efforts to keep out perceived-invaders escalated to literal, strategic acts of harassment and terror (most infamously exemplified toward Beth Elliot⁴⁰), particularly toward trans women, who bore and continue to face the bulk of cultural feminists’ — and now TERFs’ — abuse and neglect.⁴¹

Beth Elliot’s harassment occurred at The Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival (MichFest), a “female-only” music festival that was in many ways the spatial representation of cultural feminist ideology. In her critique of separatism, Sharon Stone notes that while “the less contact one had with men, the better” the true pinnacle of cultural feminist success was that “one magic weekend of the year” that “[cultural feminists] planned the whole year around,” Michfest.⁴² At MichFest, embodied, ideological, and cultural outsiders would be physically expelled from an idealized state come to life. This policy, known as a “womyn-born-womyn” policy, has interesting rhetorical implications for the trans “born-this-way” debate. However, its status as a mere euphemism for biological essentialism (in which femaleness is fixed and predetermined, and

³⁸Stone, Sharon Dale. “Bisexual Women and the ‘Threat’ to Lesbian Space: Or What If All the Lesbians Leave?” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1996, p. 103., doi:10.2307/3346927.

³⁹ Debunked with evidence in *Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and Recommendations* (2011).

⁴⁰ See <http://revolution.berkeley.edu/la-lesbian-newspaper-beth-elliott-controversy/>, an account of Beth Elliot’s violent ejection from the (now-notorious) Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival in 1973. The attached newspaper article is a fascinating time-capsule into the sexgender politics of the era, introducing Elliot by initially misgendering her (despite using her pronouns later on) and at the same time managing to use misogynistic language (“shrieking”) against trans-hating lesbians while seeming to support Elliot’s desire to perform.

⁴¹ For a detailed look at the social and cultural underpinnings of transmisogyny, see Isoxys. *Transmisogyny* 101. 20 June 2019, isoxys.tumblr.com/post/185735331295/transmisogyny-101.

⁴² Stone, 104.

womanhood is inherently attached to femaleness) is more significant.⁴³ ⁴⁴ It could best be termed a “woman-born-female” one, bolstered by the belief that a “natural” woman, now connected with an isolated, “natural” landscape, could engage with lesbian culture at its most pure. Here, we see lesbianism not only as a practice and identity but as a values system, best practiced in isolation from outsiders. Both within the festival and without, community homogeneity was expected, as was the homogenous series of life experiences — “female socialization” from which trans women were always-already excluded — still expected as a universal qualifier for *real womanhood*, even as it ignored differences in race, class, ability, and more.⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ ⁴⁷

The universalized experiences and values they attribute to being “female,” however, directly replicate the patriarchal values that preceded them. Regardless of professed ideology, biological essentialist arguments, which regard particular values as inherent to particular bodies, have the same results:

The "female values" cultural feminists proclaimed—either with openly biologicistic arguments...or with behaviorist window dressing—were none other than the traditional feminine virtues. Once again we were alleged to be loving, nurturing, in tune with nature, intuitive and spiritual rather than genital in our eroticism, while men were violent, preda-

⁴³ That is, a trans woman who has always been a woman — adhering to trans “born this way” convention — would also not be permitted to enter the space.

⁴⁴ Maxfield, Mary. “The Safety Net: Troubling Safe Space as a Social Justice Aim.” *The Safety Net: Troubling Safe Space as a Social Justice Aim*, May 2016, http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=bgsu1460105175.

⁴⁵ Halberstam, 121.

⁴⁶ Tate, Charlotte Chucky, and Mercedes D. Pearson. “Toward an Inclusive Model of Lesbian Identity Development: Outlining a Common and Nuanced Model for Cis and Trans Women.” *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2015, pp. 102-103., doi:10.1080/10894160.2015.1076237.

⁴⁷ This isn’t to say that people who happen to call themselves trans are inherently different from those who don’t, but rather that the decision to get marked as trans in order to obtain biomedical intervention emerges from a set of conditions that not all gender non-conforming people experience.

tory, alienated from nature, committed to a sterile rationalism and obsessed with genital sex. (There was some disagreement on whether men were hopeless cases or whether women could teach them female values and thereby “humanize” them.) Thus “radical feminism” came full circle, from challenging the polarization of the sexes to affirming it and embracing a reverse sexism [sic].⁴⁸

These essentialist beliefs need not be called “reverse sexism.” Rather, they are simply sexism in its most literal sense: that is, upholding the classificatory construct of sex. Such fatalism transforms cultural feminism from an effort at liberation to a doomsday ideology, seeking to make its community a bunker from the men-male-masculine Others marked as irredeemable. Reifying the attachment of certain values to sexgendered characteristics, and biologizing not only sex but *gender* as a shorthand for determining community inclusion, cultural feminists were able to expel masculinity, manhood, and maleness at once from their realm of sympathy and their physical space. This fixation on woman-female preservation ensured lesbians be brought unequivocally into the realm of what would later be termed “cisness” — as mentioned earlier, lesbianism came to signify extra-womanhood, rather than [butch] inversion or gender-crossing.

However, while expulsion of men and especially “maleness” (erroneously applied to trans women) remains popular among TERFs, the ideological descendants of the cultural feminists, their relationship to butchness has changed. No longer shunned as man-like threats, butches became essential in the TERF ideological project with the rise in access to transmedical intervention — revealing the very symbolic fluidity in sexgender affiliation that they themselves deny.

⁴⁸ Willis, et al. 112

Butch Reincorporation and the Discourse of Dysphoria

With the rise of access to the means of transition, masculine/gender non-conforming (GNC) lesbians became advantageous to incorporate into the movement that had previously expelled them, along with the butch/femme culture in which their identities had been forged. Today, they are uplifted as holdouts, as radical “dinosaurs,” refusing to fall prey to an imagined trans agenda even while experiencing body-hate (MB8/7/17) (UB281). Butches were drawn by erstwhile cultural feminists into the fold through appropriating language of “dysphoria” (as well as “misgendering”) — now no longer a symptom of self-hating femaleness but a condition “most butches experience” (UB259). While, as discussed, many butches’ relationship to female-womanhood was tenuous at best, the “butch woman” was a necessary figure in reincorporating butches — now reminders of the “good old days” before widespread transmedical access — as a means of enacting transphobia (UB253; 261). Moving from an essentialism of social gender *through* “biological sex” to one whose exclusive focus appears to be biology, TERFs have taken up the argument that, because women can and should be able to present masculinely and still be women (though this argument certainly does not extend to trans women, who are derided both for the hyperfemininity demanded of them by the medical industry and for the butchness praised in their cis woman counterparts^{49 50}) there is no need for anyone to transition away from womanhood — and all attempts to do so are framed by self-hatred, fear, and inauthenticity.

⁴⁹ Bischoff, Allison. “Passing the Test: The Transgender Body and Identity.” *Washington University International Review*, 2012, pp. 108–124.

⁵⁰ Serano, Julia. “Trans-Misogyny Primer.” *Whipping Girl*, 3 Apr. 2012, juliaserano.blogspot.com/2012/04/trans-misogyny-primer.html.

Perhaps the most striking move TERFs make in order to reincorporate butches replicates the progress narrative they claim to oppose. They uphold butches, and b/f culture, as part of their shared history (even collective/historical *socialization*), and in doing so confirm a teleological relationship between butchness and transness. Bent on the preservation of the “butch woman” as intrinsically and unchangingly connected to midcentury butch gender-crossers, TERFs remove the possibility of what blogger MainelyButch calls “butch 2.0” (MB8/30/14). That is, they remove the potential for in-genre change. Further, in temporizing butchness, they claim there no difference between the butch and the transmasculine person, only that the latter has been somehow corrupted by a changing social landscape. Thus, we see that, while in earlier decades, the notion of the “political woman” — whose allegiance to the nation of womanhood is written on her body — has also become key in the assertion of dysphoric butch womanhood’s superiority over transmasculinity. Among other attributes, the butch woman is said to be especially brave and countercultural, as well as loyal to the lesbian cause. Lesbian ethnographer and author of *Unbound: Transgender Men and the Remaking of Identity* Arlene Stein introduces Nadia, a butch seeking top surgery, with a marked sense of exceptionalism: “Nadia isn’t undergoing a gender transition. She’s a gender bender who wants to modify her body *and still be recognized as female*” (UB243) [emphasis mine]. Described as the “Last Butch Standing,” Nadia functions as a foil for the three trans men in Stein’s work, a call-back to a superior past populated by “old school” butches, and a “dreamy sense of possibility” embedded in the separatist imaginary (UB381).

Though Nadia’s acquisition of top surgery is touted as a means of modifying one’s body without leaving womanhood, many other TERFs refuse the possibility of butch biomedical tran-

sition, instead instructing butches to draw from a perceived, especial strength and “live-with” dysphoria. This becomes especially important when the validity of one’s partner’s lesbianism is predicated on one’s own possession of the “correct body,” the lesbian analogue to Martino’s story of transmedical “straightening”. Transmedical intervention appears to foreclose political allegiance to womanhood when womanhood is so inextricably tied to the possessions of particular “sexed” characteristics. Again, body, ideology, and identity blur, and commitment to women, lesbianism, and the retention of the “natural” body blend.⁵¹ Transmasculine people become apostates and provoking moral panics — even when they themselves still identify with butchness (UB253)⁵². The decision to remain butch transforms into a moral one, echoing original calls for woman-identification and separatism as a vehicle toward social purity.⁵³ Depending on subculture, a butch may be permitted to deal with “her” dysphoria through transmedical means, or discouraged from doing something framed as self-hating. Regardless, TERFs universalize dysphoria in order to frame it as overcomeable, and by extension, to frame trans identification as a normalizing, mainstream, anti-queer and anti-woman move.

⁵¹ This could be resolved by no longer basing political ideological commitment to “women” on whether or not those women’s bodies have been deemed “female enough.” This reduction of women to their bodies only reflects an ideology at odds with respecting women as full persons and not mere amalgamations of body parts.

⁵² After publishing a piece on gender-neutral restrooms, Ivan Coyote was doxxed “on a right-wing evangelical pray-the-gay-away website, and a radical lesbian separatist website run by women who spelled women with a Y and didn’t want to share anything with trans people, ever” simultaneously (TBSG281). Reading the ensuing threats sent to their email address, Coyote struggled to tell the difference between the evangelicals and the TERFs.

⁵³ See Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge, 2010 for more on ideological and material contagion.

By this logic, self-identified dysphoric butches are gender martyrs, as do “detransitioners”⁵⁴ — those who choose to no longer identify with transness and/or use hormones and other means of transmedical intervention. Detransitioners are presented as the front lines of an opposition to “[the] story about top surgery that sees it as a productive movement toward a new gender identity,”⁵⁴ and thus — as mentioned in Nadia’s narrative — particularly counter-cultural (“radical”) (UB247). While the story of linear, productive transition from wrong to right is undoubtedly a harmful one, this perception of transness-as-assimilation and butchness-as-defiance is even more so. This is primarily because it values ideological purity over relief from lived suffering. It also reproduces a real/fake trans binary, and keeps dysphoria as a sickness to be cured: this time, by “woman-centered” community. It presupposes that all butches who shrug off the label or attempt to add to it seek to “decamp” from women’s spaces entirely — that a change in body amounts to a renouncement of allyship (BAAN67). Most of all, the increasing popularity of detransition discourses raises anxieties around transmedical interventions for young people whose parents are vulnerable to tall tales of trans indoctrination — efforts by a vilified outside world to defile female purity.

The post-reincorporation logics of *butch dysphoria* serve several key functions in TERF discourse, the primary of which is to assert a moral high ground over identically-“dysphoric” trans people receiving medical intervention. Butches, who now return to womanhood only as representatives of its most tortured and subversive corners — become commodities and calls to a

⁵⁴ My initial plan of study was to look mostly at stories of detransition to address the onto-epistemological problems of trans(/)butchness I now address in this thesis: then, I realized that (while no point of view is without bias) the point of view of someone who self-identified as “ex-trans” was simply inappropriate for a trans-uplifting thesis. After all, what if I went around just calling myself an ‘ex-girl’?” Usually (especially from women) I get a well-deserved cringe in response. People certainly don’t identify as “ex-Mormons” because they approve of the group. A committed identity of “ex-”ness implies the identifier has a big enough problem with that thing to warrant it.

romanticized, ahistorical [her]story. While the concept of dysphoria itself is an issue that demands attention from people across the spectrum transness and cisness, across body and ability, this is not because all “females” secretly have it. Rather, we need to look at the charge the term has taken on as a key to medically-gatekept trans intervention, and the way in which recent appropriation of the term was done with precisely this knowledge — the democratization of “dysphoria” should lead to its ultimate abolition, allowing for each of us, identity notwithstanding, to seek the bodies we choose. TERFs, on the other hand, took up the term dysphoria in bad faith, seeking to make the act of transition appear useless because it does not fit their political agenda. This is a punch-down at trans survival, not an attack on a medical industry that does indeed monopolize the trans narrative, laying bare the hollowness of their resistance to structures of, power, even while claiming radicalism. In the meantime, this arbitrary and false division between the loyal butch and the trans turncoat manifest their dangerous presumptions, driving different occupants of trans(/)butchness apart, and promoting the deadly isolationism TERFs tout as revolutionary.

Entirely Butch? MainleyButch & Butch Flight

Amid claims that access to transmedical technologies produces only butch flight, some butches are calling into question the direct relationship between biomedical intervention and loss of butch identification, including a blogger whose ambivalent dance with “trans” and “butch” illustrate the process of living-in-complexity. Blogger MainelyButch (MB), fifty-eight years old as of 2020, identifies variously with “Stone Butch, Hard Butch, Butchboi, TransButch, and Butch” (MB8/28/2014). Her life and changing relationship with butchness and her body reflect a refusal of stasis, despite the growing stereotype of butches as blocked and regressive; at the same time, her genre of gender-nonconformity troubles assumptions about what it means to be “trans,” MB herself dancing with the term though avoiding full identification. Unlike the idealized old butch dyke advanced as a counterpoint to the trans subject, MB engages with trans-making mechanisms, including top surgery and testosterone while disidentifying with trans subjectivity itself. Understanding herself as trans-of-lesbian but also as lesbian-of-transness, MB writes herself into a unique generational and identificatory position, one which embodies transbutchness’s challenges and possibilities.

From early in her blog’s archive, MB articulates a shared oppression with trans people, despite different personal identities and social conventions. She primarily establishes difference generationally: while not foreclosing the possibility of young butches and old trans people, she attributes her own identity to the “old-school butch” culture in which she grew up. That said, MB also recognizes her place alongside trans people in combatting the gender binary. Despite experiential specificity, she writes that all gender non-conforming people suffer similarly in a culture “overtaken by separatist lesbians who are busily hating on FtMs as well as on the Butch / Femme

lesbian community at large” (MB4/15/14). In her writing, she frequently combines “Butch/Transphobia” rather than distinguishing between them: both butchphobia and transphobia stem from a hatred of those who trouble gender and resist prescribed norms of womanhood. MB thus calls for big-tent solidarity against TERFs, who she derides for driving all manner of non-normative masculinity from lesbian community. While she does not claim transness, MB *practices* transness here: her Butch⁵⁵ gender places her on the “opposite side” of TERFs in a battle over butch flight and a growing trans population.

What does it mean to be Butch-gender? MB begins writing about Butch gender 2014 — the year of the so-called transgender tipping point⁵⁶. “Saddened not to find Butch or Femme as gender identities” amid growing gender-selection options on Facebook, MB sees a dearth of information on Butch/Femme gender that her blog posts aim to remedy (MB4/15/14). In addition to using her own words, MB also cites many of the same butch authors I cite in this thesis — namely S. Bear Bergman — in order to describe her relationship to gender, creating a citational chain of Butches to counteract the invisibility she feels. Between exceeding cisness and refusing transness, MB deems butch and femme both subversive choices and intrinsic conditions, unchangeable genres that must be lived truthfully and distinct in community, history, and aim from the label “trans.” She gestures at the unclassifiable in-between space Butch occupies when citing Bergman’s *Butch is a Noun*, whose very title reads as in agreement with MB’s refusal of cis *or* trans containment. After an unsuccessful 2014 encounter with Facebook’s extended gender options, she angrily cites Bergman amid a sense of invisibility: “I too tried to put ‘Butch’ in as my

⁵⁵ Capitalized in accordance with her preference.

⁵⁶ Steinmetz, Katy. “The Transgender Tipping Point.” *Time*, 29 May 2014, time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/.

gender, it IS my fucking gender! I have always seen Butch as a noun; *as the gender that I am, and not some nickname*, or anything like that” [emphasis mine] (4/15/14). This passage adds another layer to our understanding of MB’s gender: that is, MB *is Butch*, she has (always-)already *been Butch*, considering dressing *femininely* to be “cross-dressing” and the use of “he” pronouns to be misgendering — seeing manhood instead of butchness (4/27/14)(MB8/21/15). This distinguishes her from both always-already women and always-already trans(masculine) people: all were “born this way” but all were born different from each other. In short, MB is unsatisfied with the expanded “trans” options available to her because “Butch” is the only gendered-term that consistently fits her lifelong experience and (to her) inborn identity.

Though sure of who she is, MB struggles with what to call herself, and, by extension, who to affiliate herself with. In 2014, she hesitantly places Butch, as a gender, under the “trans umbrella” (5/19/14). She writes, “I don’t fully identify with my female body, nor do [I] have many feminine characteristics. (And I fully understand the biological difference let me assure you.) Yet, I also do not identify as male,” describing what I would be tempted to term a big-tent trans, or nonbinary, identity, and with which MB later seems to agree⁵⁷ (MB9/24/14). However, MB also distinguishes “having a chest that doesn’t match [her] identity,” from being “born in the wrong body,” an ontological difference between the “butch” from the “transguy” (MB8/5/14) (6/10/15). Being born in the wrong body, she says, is a distinctly trans feeling, one she is excluded from by virtue of having a “butch heart” (BAAN69). Thus, though she thought “repeatedly about [her] possibly being Trans, FtM, but [she] could not find that comfort in the thought of being a man that [she] found in being a Butch” (MB4/27/14). Drawing from other transbutches’

⁵⁷ In 2019, MB refers to herself as “in between the binary.” (MB8/30/19).

narratives, especially S. Bear Bergman's: through Bergman, as well as Coyote and Feinberg, she is able to be "a butch," an identity category all its own: "I read the book 'Butch is a Noun' by S. Bear Bergman and *then I knew my true identity as a Butch*" [emphasis mine] (MB4/27/14). Years later, she reaffirms with an indirect citation of Bergman: "I like to think that Butch is my actual gender...I am neither man nor woman, but somewhere in between and we call that "Butch" in my world. In my world Butch is a noun" (MB12/13/2016).

The story MB tells about her life, then, centers around this presumption that she embodies butch-nounhood, that her story of gender-discovery must understand butchness parallel to transness, yet also ontologically different from it. MB's coming-of-queerness story (whose ambiguous ending anticipates her ultimate decision to get a mastectomy, an outward reflection of her intrinsic butchness) further reflects the belief that butchness is inborn and ultimately impossible to suppress in those who have it. Through a hostile childhood, an even more hostile anti-Butch lesbian scene, and internal struggles toward self-realization, Butchness was the thing that remained:

Pretending I was a boy was my other very well kept secret [...] By the time I reached early adulthood I was hearing the "you should dress more like a girl" thing quite often[.]
[...]

I tried to disown or hide my gender identity for many years. I was far more comfortable with being "just a lesbian" than with being identified as "Butch" or "Dyke" (both were seen as derogatory words in the 80's). Although it was pretty obvious that I was Butch, I tried to "act" otherwise and hated being referred to as Butch back then.

It wasn't until around 2005 that I finally came to grips with my gender identity, and started to relax into my authentic self as a Butch Lesbian. I spent many years agonizing over it; and it caused me much emotional trauma at times. I never quite "fit" anywhere in the gender spectrum, let alone the Lesbian social scene.

[...]

I found Butch books, cd's and with Youtube came short videos – of Butches similar to me! My comfort level with my gender presentation; with my androgyny and my more masculine preferences, began to feel more “normal” to me and much, *much more nurturing to my inner self* (4/27/14)

[emphases mine].

Notably, MB writes that she was a “young Butch” rather than a mere tomboy. Thus, she can frame her mastectomy not as a betrayal of her inner butchness, but a reflection of it (8/21/15). Unlike TERFs, MB's belief in dysphoria as a constituent part of her inner butchness does not imply a mandate to “live with” that discomfort. Instead, it opens the door to confronting and eliminating that discomfort while remaining true to one's self and community — to “transition” yet not “flee” (MB8/5/14). Thus, her pursuit of what she calls a “more male and flatter” chest becomes an inherently-butch decision, connected to a childhood spent shirtless in her yard (4/27/14)(8/30/14).

In fact, MB ultimately moves one step beyond acknowledging top surgery as a butch possibility, naming flat-chestedness (resulting from dysphoria) as a standard part of the butch condition that post-reincorporation TERFs both expect and repress. Simultaneously fetishizing butch pain and pathologizing it, MB reveals the ways in which butch flight fears facilitate body-policing by TERFs, who refuse her access to her true self (MB6/24/14). She remarks on the irony of butches being encouraged to “either [bind], [have] small boobs to begin with or [wear] 3 sports bras and a [sic] oversized frumpy shirt," but denied the option of mastectomy; forced to live “trapped" by “an old-school rule" (MB8/30/14). Post-surgery, she also writes critically of the “nonconformist” assumptions that come with TERF butch reincorporation, assumptions that caused her grief as she considered the possibility of surgery:

Butches do get trotted out for being non-conformist rebels... We are ridiculed for having top surgery, are expected to just live with the dysphoria and discomfort without complaint instead of seeking the things that will make us happier. The anniversary of my top surgery was just 1 year ago this week now and I am reminded that it's not “proper” for Butches to seek top surgery. *We're supposed to just bind and live with the boobs; hey we're not “trans” right?* And only transguys should have top surgery, or so I am told. Bullshit. *It's the best Butch thing I have ever done for myself,* and I am so much more comfortable in my own skin now (MB8/21/15) [emphasis mine].

Butches are simultaneously cast as too-trans and necessarily-cis, chafing at the edges of womanhood without clearing it. Not only does this give TERFs a cudgel to swing at trans people, but, as MB notes, TERFs “*enjoy a butch who has dysphoria,*” with suffering is a constituent part of

the butch aesthetic for which they are so nostalgic (MB8/30/14). We see here that butches can be nonconformists so long as their nonconformity does not threaten the social order it highlights. Rather than a mode of resistance, butchness illuminates normative lesbianism as a tenuously-acceptable “less-than-trans” limit. This framing sets itself firmly against the possibility of solidarity. Yet, MB finds solidarity in this shared castigation by TERFs, turning “trans” from a thing to be done to a thing done to people, a method of alienation, in this case from lesbianism. For this reason, MB hesitantly places butchness as a “transgender” — a gender that crosses lines — without identifying *as* transgender (BAAN66). Not simply an inborn non-conformity, butchness is *transed* when TERFs refuse butches admission to their “side.”

MB’s story, like the archetypal trans story, is a contradictory one: it is both a return-to-true-self and crossing-into-true-self. As the one to start the conversation about her surgery and T, MB can assuage ambient fears that she, an “old school” Stone Butch, will “*go further* and become male or [sic] transgender” [emphasis mine] (9/24/14). Instead, she wonders how many other butches, particularly those for whom the “older school way of being Butch” was the only option, would receive the same surgery if they could — not because they were truly trans men, but because, as MB emphasizes, top surgery is a part of many butches’ self-realization, the exact opposite of a fissure (MB3/6/15)(MB8/30/19). For herself, MB writes “I don’t see [top surgery] as a loss to my body in any way, but as a giant step forward,” having “never felt comfortable in [her] well endowed female chest ever” (MB8/5/14). This is especially true given that, by removing the “one thing that men would find feminine” about her, MB saw a mastectomy as a way of taking her butchness “to the next level” (8/30/14). As we have seen, through the discourses of both trans-formation and return to internal truth, MB is able to gain agency over the story that

gets her “transed” by TERFs. Equally, she is able to suggest heretofore taboo desires in other “old-school butches” without nonconsensually “transing” them, leaving top surgery-as-butche affirmation a narrative all its own, worthy of public conversation.

Because of her unique approach to the trans(/)butch nexus, MB’s decision to get a mastectomy promises an approach to surgery and presentation whose attachment to gender is neither traditionally-butche nor traditionally-trans. Her experience highlights that trans-formational surgery does not inherently lead to or stem from “transness” — that gender identification and surgical intervention are only sometimes related. Put another way, the absence of a gender-making surgery does not eliminate the possibility of one’s transness, either. Both with-transness and not-trans, MB opens the possibility to think about gender-crossing several steps removed from body-modification, and instead as set within a constellation of social, experimental, and psychological factors for which there are no definite “rules.” To understand MB’s experience, and that of many others, we must not only refuse a gender-binary framework, but also an ostensibly-progressive framework that compels people to choose butchness or transness, *and* one which demands one’s trans(/)butch relationship be easily-writeable. Rather, MB’s refusal to completely disavow transness nor give up butchness suggests a post-identity solidarity much like that I advance throughout this thesis; one based on a shared (though not identical) internal experience as well as collective resistance to marginalization by TERFs and transmedicalists alike. Determined to “continue to do Butch MY way,” as she writes, MB is embodied evidence of a dynamic butch identity (MB8/30/14). As long as innate-butches continue to be born, she argues, top surgery can and should be available to them: not as a way of trans-forming them into the *same* genre of people as their transmasculine brothers, but as a way of bringing their butchness to its own fruition.

The possibilities top surgery opens are as wide as the diverse array of patients seeking it: limitless.

*

Almost all of my friends who did not enter my life as trans, nonbinary, or otherwise gender non-conforming have either become so, or realized that they have been for a very long time (depending on their personal experience and philosophical approach). I have been scrolling through Instagram since the fall 2019 semester has ended, two years post-top surgery and one year post-hysterectomy, watching another wave of beloved friends and classmates receive their surgeries. I remind them to air out their sutures once a day. I am overjoyed by what they have made of themselves, what they continue to build, and that I have been witness to the process.

I sit with friends who realized their transness only a few years ago, went on T and speak with thick, crackling voices. Among these guys, my effeminacy sometimes emerges and plays. Other times, I sit wide and rest my elbows on my knees, contorting my stance to strain my t-shirt across my now-flat chest. In both situations I explain this thesis to them, explain how to get doctors to care about you, how to get insurance to (im/ap)prove your existence. I always end up talking with my hands. We become with each other. Some I became friends with long before their crackling voices and growing beards, before they realized they could even *they*.

There are others, too. A friend of mine who had been using she and they — a common tactic for newly-nonbinary people who want to save themselves the internal shame of feeling misgendered constantly, despite exclusive desire to use a neutral pronoun — told me one day “it’s only ‘they,’ now, actually” after I incorrectly she’d them. They have leaned into transness.

Another friend, a she/they, corrected me immediately when I called them “trans”: *I’m nonbinary, not trans.*

“I just didn’t want to make you feel less trans because you weren’t getting surgery,” I told them hastily, embarrassed at my counter-productive efforts at inclusiveness. “I just believe that anyone can be trans, regardless of ‘transition status’. We have common experiences, even if our embodiments are different. I believe in democratizing—”

“Yes, I know, but I’m not trans. I’m nonbinary. We’re different, too.”

I was dumbfounded, went back to the ideological drawing board. I thought about the terminological free-for-all that is this thesis. I had grown so accustomed to using “trans” as my big-tent term — grateful when that irritating, qualifying asterisk declined in popularity — that the request *not* to use it felt like a personal critique. Truthfully, I had grown accustomed to being listened-to on gender matters: my education, race, class, and access to medical intervention have aided me. For all my personal and academic passion around destabilizing language, I can also fall into the trap of presumption.

“Thanks,” I said. I stopped myself before I said, “sorry, I’m learning,” because that is what cis people say and I was in no mood to embarrass myself again. Instead I said, “we need better words for us. I mean, us together.” I imagine “guys” to be beginning that work.

For some, “‘trans’ [...] is a description far outside” their experience, one accurately summable as bigender, genderfluid, genderqueer, and nonbinary (XY283). Gender non-conformity does not come exclusively in my size, nor my emotional register. To think otherwise would be to turn it back into a diagnosis — a category of assessment and subsequent application only to those who “fit.”

Claiming Coyote

Like MB, Ivan Coyote has an ongoing butch history, but one also complicated and enhanced by transness. As a result, they are engaged in a consent process of “balancing [them]self and [their] language and words and work in the space between them” (GF270). Both firm in their commitment to butchness (and/as their refusal of T, implicitly connected to their butch legitimacy) and transness, Coyote most struggles not with which identities they choose for *themselves*, but who within those corresponding communities claim them. TERFs, anxious about “butch flight,” have multiple times claimed Coyote as a stalwart butch, hanging onto imagined “old ways,” by refusing T, using she/her pronouns for media purposes, and — until their top surgery — keeping their breasts. Coyote became a pawn in butch flight discourses, an example of a butch who didn’t flee into transness. While definitively refusing TERF politics, Coyote’s own transition narrative betrays their internal anxiety over butch belonging as they increasingly understand themselves through a trans framework.

Coyote is deeply impacted by the cultural significance of TERFs on lesbian life, perhaps most clearly exemplified by their narration of testosterone and their refusal of it. Their vocal refusal of T is not only radical narrative resistance to transnormativity, but also a means of reinforcing transbutch limits. but also as a mode of reinforcing transbutchness as a form of transness with chemical limits. As long as they remain within this limit, one of their feet remains firmly in the butch “boat” they fear rocking or falling from (GF295). This leads to public compromises of what is privately strong pro-trans conviction. While decrying TERF politics in their books, Coyote hesitates to outwardly refuse allegiance with butch flight-fearers: when praised for representing true “butch womanhood,” Coyote does not question the speaker for the assumptions in which

the statement was grounded (GF269). In truth, even as they increasingly identify with transness, they narrate their refusal of transnormativity (and periodic denial of trans-legitimacy) as a way of reinforcing their true-butchness, as if true-butchness is defined by a masculinity “not-quite-enough” to be trans (recall MB calling becoming trans “going further” than being a butch). As long as they deviate from true-trans demands by refusing T, Coyote thinks, they will never be a *disappearing butch* — they will retain their butchness even while navigating transmedical institutions, stopping themselves short of “betrayal.” They will remain claimable by those whose politics they abhor, but to whose long lineage they are beholden.

Coyote, steeped in the rhetoric that transition is rooted in “internalized misogyny” whose resulting dysphoria must merely be “coped with,” spends decades struggling to occupy their ultimately-intolerable body, and seeing this body valorized by TERF media. They long bound their chest into a shape that made it “easier to look in the mirror” while avoiding the thought of surgery and later attempt weightlifting to lessen the prominence of their chest (TBSG119; 142). However, upon reaching middle age (with its own bodily transition) Coyote’s breasts become impossible. Their mastectomy is a decision wracked with guilt; Coyote performs narrative contrition for supposedly-incorrect body-hatred by writing “I wish I could say I learned to be truly comfortable in this body of mine before I finally had top surgery in 2013, but that would be a lie” (TBSG142). Their shame and fear only worsen as they become a paragon of self-loving butchness just a week before surgery, breasts invoked as a symbol of their ideological purity (TBSG 141; 179; 213). A CBC article on “the disappearing butch” praises Coyote’s ostensible butch (“woman”) identity and (strategic, for simplicity’s sake) usage of she/her pronouns in media interviews (GF80). These writers of “second-wave feminist backlash” against transition have

“more of an investment in [Coyote's] being female than [Coyote did],” yet Coyote’s own fear of their repudiation is strong: who were they, if not connected to the butchness that raised them into who they were? The very butchness that gave them comfort while considering trans identification now seemed to keep them from it.

Post-operation, Coyote uses logics similar to MB’s to internally and narratively justify their choice. They claim a natural butchness through the language of born-this-way transness, largely through the language of tomboyhood. However, Coyote largely rejects “female socialization” as reasoning for their continued butchness *and* inherent transness. Instead, they strategically identify with the “born-this-way” rhetorics they eschew in their interactions with the medical industry, in order to confirm their transness as inevitable:

I didn’t not want to be a girl because I had been told that they were weaker or somehow lesser than boys. It was never that simple. I didn’t even really actively not want to be like the other girls. *I just knew. I just always knew that I wasn’t. I couldn’t. I would never be* (TBSG20) [emphasis mine].

Coyote simultaneously refuses “boyhood” and claims inherent *tomboyhood*, a term they tie to their desire for a flat chest, which I will discuss in the following section. By asserting a trans true self that has always also claimed butchness, Coyote attempts to balance both long-known and recently-taken elements of their identity. Like MB, Coyote resignifies butchness, not necessarily as a gender all its own but an experience as “serious” and dynamic as transness.

Coyote’s efforts, though they rely on an “inborn” butchness, also illuminate an important site of conflict between “trans” and “butch.” With the trans “born-this-way” narrative gaining

popularity and legitimacy at the expense of those whose stories do not fit, butchness risks being marked merely as a stepping-stone on the way to “true” self realization. Stirring resentment between TERFs (who correctly refute the demotion of butchness to “unrealized transness”) and transmedicalists (who believe that genuine gender-crossing must be diagnosable and ultimately “curable”) and leaving all others as pawns between them, butchness becomes inherently less-serious than transness by virtue of its lack of formal pathologization. Specifically, butchness becomes (in the transmedical view) a gender non-conformity with nonexistent or insufficient dysphoria, or (in the TERF view) one which is forbidden from alleviating it. Though Coyote attempts to compromise — citing intrinsic tomboyhood that implies a consistent sense of embodiment derailed by puberty and other changes — they are ultimately “trapped” by the conceptual framework they, the TERFs around them, and the transmedicalists all rely on. So long as “butch-enough” and “trans-enough” are qualified in the language of dysphoria and reaction to it, claims of allegiance to one group will still appear to refute or deny the other.

Through Coyote’s own struggles between emergent transness and continued butchness, we see that essentialist conceptions of dysphoria uphold divides that cause harm to people who cross-through transbutchness. However, we also see that similar understandings of innate dysphoria indicate TERF and transmedical ideologies are more similar to each other than different. While in truth a shorthand to give trans-affirming care to the lucky few who perform it successfully (and to exclude the rest from trans identity and community), dysphoria becomes a device to uphold the gender binary under the auspices of progressivism. Coyote’s anxiety and apologies for pressing at the long-held boundaries that confirmed their own butch allegiance reveal that, as much as they gatekeep access to “transition,” discourses of dysphoria also work to, paraphrasing

MB, "keep [their] butch ass in line" (MB 6/25/2012). More than that, it keeps Coyote, me, and those like us trapped within a cisheterosexual system, deviation from which must be contained and classified, and whose failures of classification are blamed on we as non-conforming individuals. TERF attempts to ground Coyote in butchness, and (as the following section indicates) medical attempts to either fully-contain or fully-expel them from the "dysphoria" diagnosis both indicate a desire to pacify transbutch subjects. In doing so, they attempt to deradicalize and render static transness(and)butchness, producing shame and contrition where there could otherwise be insurrectionary possibility.

TRANSBUTCH LIVES, TRANSBUTCH FUTURES

My own mastectomy, performed on my nineteenth birthday, was life-changing, even life-making. I am now able to exist in my own skin. I am writing this from my bed at home. As I write this, it's almost midnight, and I am wearing a loose button-up with a wide collar. If I lean forward and look down I can see two half-moon scars across my ribcage. My journey began in earnest about a year before, when I contacted the therapist who would be my letter-writer, my insurance-justifier. I was hardly eighteen. I had been wanting to remove my breasts for almost a decade; had been wanting a mastectomy for all the years I knew I could. Yet I had in truth regarded it as a pipe dream, and continued to until the day of the procedure itself.

In January of 2017, I got my gender dysphoria diagnosis. Incidentally, I picked up an autism¹ diagnosis around the same time, which validated a lot of things about myself that I had long been aware of. I had never gone to a professional looking for a diagnosis before, they had always been slapped onto me months or years before I even realized they were there, so I wasn't sure what to expect. As it turns out, I had to do the same thing I had been doing for years: sit in front of a psychiatric professional, tell my story, get scrutinized, submit to the marking if I was deemed deserving of it. The storytelling process itself is hard for me to share, and it was hard to share back then. It spilled out of me in hardly-contained bursts. When I talk about things that hurt, I feel like I am sinking behind my own eyes, into the dark space between my eyeball and my waterline, moving backward, getting hotter and hotter until I'm about to explode. I did it, though. And I got what I wanted: I began testosterone several months later, spent a summer lis-

¹ Being autistic and being trans are very similar and often occur simultaneously — a subject worthy of its own thesis.

tening to elevator music on the phone, waiting to have thirty-second conversations with insurance companies. Meanwhile, my therapist and I cobbled together a suitable letter to send them. In the fall of 2017, my sophomore year of college, I went to a terrible consultation that, luckily, ended in me booking a surgery date.

My plans were derailed weeks later when I received notice that my insurance denied me coverage, claiming my letter was not sufficient evidence of my disorder and that they would thus not cover this treatment. I received the news on the bus, and felt as if I were suddenly laying beneath its wheels, being ground into the impossibly tiny grooves perforating the pavement below.

It was a dark period. My therapist contested the decision. When we realized the letter had been rejected purely based on semantics, she hurriedly corrected the meaningless errors that almost ruined my life and sent back the letter. I was approved. At my appointment with her that week, she said, “I would understand if you were mad at me for not writing the letter to their liking.” I told her, “I’m not angry at you. I’m not even angry. I don’t have it in me to be angry — I’m empty. I’m heartbroken.” And we both agreed that that was even worse.

I got the surgery several days after the fall semester ended. The day I moved back home for the winter — just a few days before the surgery was scheduled — I fell on a patch of ice on campus and (though I didn’t know it then) fractured several bones in my arm and mildly injured my spine. For fear of again jeopardizing my surgery, I did not seek treatment. Later, I would be told that my bones healed a bit funny but mostly, I was fine, very lucky, and blessedly young. I

trot out this story a lot — for what? To prove my trans(/)butch strength? To show I'm a true trans, willing to suffer to remove my breasts? I don't know, but I want to tell it here, too.

I was afraid before surgery, but not afraid of regretting it. I see many transbitches fearing future regrets, and I hear their worries, but this is one of the few decisions on which I personally have never wavered. I need this. I needed this. Whatever I will say theoretically about dysphoria, about trans and butch bodies, about the root or implications of different styles of body hate, it will always be modified and qualified by this experience. This experience is one I can only name with something like dysphoria, dysmorphia, something that requires its own specific language even if it is language I hate. I am tied to it. It humbles my theory-brain. It demands I do this work, even as the absence of my chest allows my intellectual efforts to expand and multiply.

The surgery itself went excellently. I woke up too joyful to be happy in the way I expected to be. I couldn't cry. I could hardly smile. I moved into a place beyond my body. I was in pain but felt as if I were on a cloud. I healed quickly, soon graduating from post-op sponge baths back to showers. I got my drains out and began to wear shirts that fit again. I wasn't "cured" of anything, but by baseline comfort and happiness rose exponentially. I began to read, write, and study more energetically than I ever could have before, no longer quite so preoccupied with self-hatred. I quickly realized in the months following my surgery that, though I now spent inordinate amounts of time marveling at the flat planes of my chest, I didn't feel transformed. I felt like myself. Though I spent some time marveling at my chest, I quickly "forgot" that I had once had breasts; I realized that, all this time, my mind had known a flat chest as my "default" and had registered the breasts as foreign, unwanted growths.

More than two years later, it is difficult to remember how breasts looked on me. I like the look of my scars, and — though embodied evidence of the intervention my flat chest required — the red semi-circles widening as they reach my underarms feel as though they, too, have always been part of me. I have also moved back to many of the styles that I loved as a young person, before I was trans. Colorful outfits, barrettes, now-growing hair, and shirts whose plunging necklines imply a wearer whose chest is far different from mine, have entered my wardrobe. I re-queer the butchness now afforded to me by my flat chest, now that breasts are no longer things I must compensate for. Now that I am free of the transmedical gaze, I do an unruly transbutchness, that destabilizes the very meaning of the word. It changed the way I dressed, the way I spoke, the way I engaged with others. It made me more confident in expanding the ways in which I expressed and continue to express myself, opening me again to clothes whose femininity would be otherwise unacceptable in conversation with breasts. This was both the result of increasing comfort with my own effeminacies now that such hated marks of the “feminine” were gone from my body, and the comforting knowledge that I would no longer need to perform dysphoria appropriately — and thus constantly question the ways in which I was presenting my “story,” — in order to obtain my body.

Ivan Coyote

Critical Top Surgery

My gender didn't change when I got top surgery. My life shifted, my body shifted, but my relationship to gender isn't directly or exclusively tied to all that. This is partially due to my own relative luck: pre-surgery, my size and shape granted me a semblance of prepubescent boyishness that marks the stereotypical androgynous body. My breasts were not large, my body not especially curvy, my waist-to-hip ratio not dramatic. I feel and felt strange when I discuss surgery with others who have or had chests exponentially larger than mine — my pre-op chest was the size others achieve via radical reduction. Body size/shape constitutes something of a flashpoint in discussions of transmedical intervention, not only because they become very real grounds for exclusion from certain procedures, but also because social expectations of thin angularity haunt trans(/)butch people in our quests for bodies we can live with.² Even for those of us with the luck and privilege of bodies that better conform to these social demands — existent for all people but especially acute for the multiply-marginalized — these expectations weigh heavily on our consciousnesses as we interpret our genders and bodies.

In trans storytelling, this triadic relationship — the body “itself,” one's sense of body-mind relationship, and the social conditions undergirding and producing it — is most frequently reduced to the language of dysphoria. Particularly in relation to breasts and top surgery, the language of dysphoria pathologizes and presents an attainable cure to trans body-hatred, presuming only one part of the triad (in this case, a disordered relationship to self-image) to be in play. Nec-

² Bergman, S. Bear. *The Body No Longer Policed By Gender*. Gay Mag, 3 Apr. 2018, gay.medium.com/the-body-no-longer-policed-by-gender-c92d6163de9b.

does the symbolic work of articulating the manhood of an otherwise-androgynous figure, surrounded by nameless and faceless bullies. While the figure's lower body is not shown, the binder makes sense of several pejoratives the bullies speak: "you're [sic] hips" one says. Another says, "You [sic] too short." Neither of these are evident in the image, however, the necessity of the binder alone suggests the existence of these other feminized attributes. Further, such representations establish top dysphoria as a "baseline" version of body-hatred, which all transmasculine subjects must pass in order to gain legitimacy; the breasts a characteristic of female-womanhood whose possession precludes transmasculine subjectivity.

With this in mind, transmedicalist emphasis on top dysphoria as a sign of trans legitimacy is unsurprising. Following the logic of the image, if one does not experience sufficient top dysphoria, then surely, they must not experience dysphoria related to their height, proportions, voice, face, and more. This, under transmedical logics, translates into a lack of acute trans-pain, a story of suffering also crucial in the trans-legitimizing arsenal. Bodily discomfort and alienation are not enough here: the pain, constriction, and lifelessness the bound chest stands in for, endured only through the power of masculinized silent suffering is constitutive of the transmasculine subject — tellingly nicknamed the "self-made man".⁵ This man, entirely detached from the girlhood which caused him only pain and moving through illness toward actualization, runs parallel to the TERF-constructed true butch I discussed in the previous section. Both valorize and even demand suffering, demand total isolation and detachment from the "opposite" sexgender, and foreclose future possibilities of crossing and experimentation. Lastly, both reify the concept of

⁵ Gevisser, Mark. "Self-Made Man." *Granta*, 13 Nov. 2014, granta.com/self-made-man/.

“dysphoria,” differing only in approach to this perceived-pathology: either deeming it an ill to be excised or a burden to be borne by the pure and righteous.

Coyote’s story of struggle and eventual access to a mastectomy not only reinforces the similarities between two seemingly-opposing reactionary gender projects, but it also reveals a genre of transbutchness that appears a biomedical impossibility, one based not on individual experience but carefully considered choices and personal affiliations. Standing with “one foot on a trans-shaped rowboat and the other foot resting on a butch dock,” Coyote complicates transmedical understandings of dysphoric existence and pushes audiences toward an autonomous and affiliational transbutchness (GF270).

Narrating Diagnosis, Critiquing Power

In *Gender Failure*, Ivan Coyote re-narrates their experience with top surgery, a story marked by disbelief and distrust on the part of medico-psychiatric professionals. Making “a special case for [them]self that [they were] trans enough [...] broken in the right way,” Coyote draws attention to the impossible and contradictory demands placed on trans people by the medical industry: the trans subject must be sick, yet presentable; broken, yet charming; unwell, yet otherwise-healthy (GF78-79). From office to office, we follow Coyote through the many elements of trans bureaucracy, from diagnosis to approval to procedure. Formal diagnosis of gender dysphoria necessitates an extensive battery of questions, which Coyote reproduces in *Gender Failure*, a subversive reversal in which they, suddenly, are the administrator of the te[s/x]t meant to define them (94-98). While this re-presentation, much like the memoir itself, challenges norms of medical authority and authorship — it selects scenes and stories to present the reader rather than giving up a coherent and normative life’s story — its content reveals medico-psychiatric constraints on transbutch storytelling. It also challenges the cis reader, with a nod and a wink, to face the self-assessment required of trans people, simply to prove we are the genders other people get at birth.

In the psychologist’s office, Coyote reveals the arbitrariness and harm of diagnostic gate-keeping (as represented in part by the aforementioned questionnaire), which forces trans people to be both sane and sick at once. “Think about it,” they write, “how would that feel to be told that just being yourself is a disorder, but if I don’t say the right things and they don’t say those words gender identity disorder, then I pay for everything out of pocket myself [?]” Coyote’s psychologist scoured their story in relation to diagnostic keywords. At first, Coyote appears doomed for

precisely the same reasons that TERFs clung to them: continuing to use “she/her” pronouns in the media and thus refusing trans convention. Coyote was also uninterested in starting testosterone, oftentimes presented as a “first-step” in a suite of successive transmedical interventions. Luckily, Coyote *did* present a crucial marker of manhood, and conversation turned positive the moment they mentioned packing a prosthetic phallus in their underwear (GF80). This became the sole reason for their ultimate GD diagnosis. Both in-the-moment and in their retelling, Coyote emphasizes the absurdity of this decision: “I can’t believe this...Don’t tell me this all comes down to whether or not I carry a dick in my pants,” (GF81). Yet, the packing alone proved their body to be surgically-resolvable, a dysphoric body curable by mastectomy.

Despite having to meet stringent diagnostic criteria — proving themselves to be *sick enough* — the trans person must be eminently stable: *only* mentally ruffled by the overwhelming experience of dysphoria which prohibits them from true sanity. The simultaneous contradictory performance of “sick” and “well” are crucial in attaining medical legitimacy. My own experience of chest dysphoria was always relatively in-line with the standard trans narrative and I was also willing to be on testosterone, yet if I had not concealed my psychological disabilities from my assessors, I would likely have been denied or, at least, had my surgery delayed indefinitely. To effectively obtain transmedical intervention I, like Coyote, had to *show* and *tell* both transness and sanity.

As disability studies scholars have also pointed out, in order to receive a necessary diagnosis, we must dress correctly, say the right words, ensure we do not betray a prior Google or WebMD search (for fear of hypochondriasis). We must give the performance of our lives in order to prove a supposedly-self-evident truth. I myself wore mens’ (boys’, actually — like the crying

trans character on page three, I am short and sad about it) jeans, sneakers, and an oversized flannel to my own top surgery consultation, which covered the fact that, due to my tactile sensitivities, I could not bind my breasts. For their part, Coyote is praised by their psychiatrist for being “dapperly dressed and very punctual,” neatness and timeliness both euphemisms for legible sanity and for the “conventional lifestyle” Martino valorizes in the ideal trans patient (GF83)(E211). Thus, we see that normative gender presentation and normative sane/abled presentation are inextricably linked. Today, several years removed from the trans diagnostic process, I flirt with new genres of presentation: I wear my denim capris and sheep-emblazoned sweater. I pair a flannel shirt, thick jeans, and sparkling hair clips with tiny desserts attached. No “transmasc” *in their right mind* would show up to an appointment like that.

Coyote does not make an explicit connection between the trans diagnostic process and other forms of medico-psychiatric ableism, most likely due to gaps in their own experience. However, there is also value in their bare shock at the medico-psychiatric system of diagnosis, illustrating the arbitrariness with which in/sanities are delegated, and the practiced performance required to embody either. Furthermore, their difficulties even after receiving a psychiatric referral are indicative of other struggles faced by disabled people under the medical gaze, particularly the mandate to tell a coherent, tight, and foolproof “story” of self in exchange for legitimacy. Coyote’s “story” was published and circulated as sensitivity-training for those who would have been their psychiatrists. Due to fears of bias — that is, an understanding of the full humanity and capacity of the “patient” as an individual — the majority of psychiatrists that could work with Coyote were immediately disqualified from diagnosing them.

To sum it up, most of the psychiatrists who the government looked to so they could decide whether or not I was trans were unable to assess me because I had written about being trans, and they had read some of my work while learning about how to deal with trans people, and so *were no longer objective enough to decide fairly if I was trans or not*. This resulted in delays, and probably more paperwork. Conflict of whose interest, exactly? Interesting question (GF82) [emphasis mine].

Here, Coyote's transbutch movement is metatextual. They have written their transbutchness into being so extensively that their works must now be censored in order for an "objective" assessment to take place. Coyote the trans patient must necessarily not be Coyote the teacher, writer, and activist, from whom these same professionals learned about trans experience. To acknowledge Coyote's authorship of their own story would threaten a longstanding medico-psychiatric grip on patient narratives. It is for this reason that, when Coyote finally finds a psychiatrist who has not read their books, they tell their story of transness solely in answers to the psychiatrist's questions: talking about their "gender history" and "relationship with [their] father" (GF83). This psychiatrist, per apparent mandate, needed to distance himself from Coyote's self-told story in order to construct a transmedical story.

Ultimately, the diagnostic encounter highlights Coyote's psychological and temporal disengagement from the transmedical story, revealing clearly the social construction of diagnosis, including dysphoria diagnosis. Coyote's psychiatrist immediately balks at their admission of having bound for nineteen years, remarking that "that torture" is something many of his patients found intolerable after two weeks (GF83). Coyote, like many of those marginalized by medicine

and psychiatry, responds with a joke: “I don’t like to rush into things,” they say, making their psychiatrist laugh (GF83). (Coyote, with great irony, writes of this encounter in the very book next on some psychiatrist’s diversity reading list). Humor aside, Coyote’s nearly-two-decades of binding were a painful “choice” for which there was long no other option. Far from placing the “adolescent trans kid” and the “old butch dyke” at odds, however, this difference in procedural access can allow us to look at transbutch temporal differences, and the way that we (and Coyote, and even their incredulous psychiatrist) can identify continuities across transbutch embodiments.

As we know, unlike their contemporary youth counterparts, Coyote had no means of demanding early intervention, nor the cultural environment in which a mastectomy seemed possible. Whether or not they would have, if available, is irrelevant, because their genre of transbutchness has already been shaped by their relationship to transmedical in access — to change this would be to change their identity, as long as identity is the result of socially-mediated processes and not intrinsic truth. Coyote *became* a butch in Little Sister’s bookstore, wearing oversized work boots (TBSG141). Long believing that their non-desire for T made them “wrong kind of trans guy” and therefore not trans at all, and feeling the social pressures of the TERFs who claimed them, Coyote’s was not simply a path to transness stymied for nineteen years. It included but did not guarantee transness, just as neither their binding nor their packing were the inherent signifiers of a true-trans subject that psychological professionals turned them into. Instead, Coyote’s decision to receive top surgery is one step a wholly unique gender-trail spanning their entire life, one specific to their age, area, and experience (GF80).

Acutely aware of this specificity as they build an acceptable trans narrative for diagnosis, Coyote handles the story of their diagnostic process with wit and tenderness. Crossing temporal

and generational boundaries is perhaps their greatest strength as a narrator, and they do so not only in establishing solidarity between themselves and young trans people, but also between themselves and readers unfamiliar with medical dehumanization. Despite the demand to give the elements of their life's story to be analyzed and reshaped by medicine, Coyote also finds an opportunity to author-ize their own narrative in the collections I discuss, stepping beyond the category of "patient" and retelling the very process that threatened to flatten their transbutch complexities, or use them as an excuse to deny care.

Among the Guys

As they tell the story of their top surgery, Coyote is also conscious of their privilege (both social and material) over other trans(/)butches. The diagnosis of “dysphoria” can make a trans person of a butch — can welcome some to an exclusive club at the expense of others. They highlight both the legitimacy of their marginalized siblings’ genders and the gates which, though difficult for Coyote themselves to climb, are unscalable for others. These are the “guys who had been binding for [nineteen years] or even longer, guys who couldn’t afford the cost or the time off, or who didn’t have any health insurance at all, or who didn’t jump through the right hoops or say the right things to the right suits” (GF83). Coyote themselves was in danger of being one of the guys to which they refer: as a special case due to their non-desire of testosterone, possessing “guyhood” without manhood, they were at definite risk of being refused surgery even after nineteen years of pain. Outcome of their pursuit of surgery notwithstanding, they take time in their story to emphasize their relationship with this undifferentiated group of *other guys*, raising unanswerable questions as to their relationship with trans(/)butchness and with manhood.

Coyote turns the word “guy” into one of ambiguous transbutch possibility, recognizing it as a gesture to social affinity beyond specific identity. Amid debates as to the gender-neutrality of the phrase “you guys,” Coyote’s perspective is a welcome one: “guys” is a gender-expansive public to be identified-with. It isn’t gender-neutral, but gender-malleable and -encompassing: after all, Coyote “[doesn’t] think that trans people hold the monopoly or wrote the only book on hating our bodies” (TBSG151). Put another way, trans is not a terminological requirement for all who experience bodily-alienation, nor does bodily-alienation have to guarantee the assumption of any trans label. Instead, Coyote argues, this shared experience is an invitation to shared guy-

hood, other labels notwithstanding. Pre-surgery, for example, they comment that the compression shirts available to flatten cis mens' "man boobs"⁶ don't work for "guys like us" (GF76). "Guys like us" becomes the common language through which Coyote can speak both to those who have received top surgery and those who remain in compression tank tops to this day. The word does not refer to sameness in experience of embodiment, but suggests a social, political agreement. "Guys" creates a rhetorical solidarity that welcomes those with differential access to the technologies of diagnosis and different material, spacial, and temporal relationships to trans(/)butchness.

With this in mind, we see that "guy" functions as a post-identity, not offering essential truths but signifying *approaches* to transbutch relationality. Coyote's approach is best represented in one touching part of *Gender Failure*: they give their old "butch clothes" to an eighteen-year-old, newly-out trans man (GF180-182). They mentor and share across identity, respecting their differences in experience while understanding that they can still fit into the same clothes. As for themselves, Coyote's relationship to "guy" and "man"hood is somewhat ambiguous: are they "among" the guys, are *they* a guy, and what is the relationship of the "guy" to the surviving tomboy? Again, Coyote's performative refusal of these questions reflects their singular desire to "broaden the joining" without defining the parameters of that which was to be joined, just as they did and do with tomboyhood (TBSG133). "True transness" becomes an arbitrary and even laughable question, suffering a foolish measure of legitimacy, in the face of enduring friendship. Exposing the futility of such questions, Coyote turns the questioning back onto the reader:

My next question is for you. Am I trans enough now? [...] If so, why?

⁶ Coyote, curiously, calls their breasts "these ladies" (GF76).

Please rate the strength of your feelings from one to five, one meaning you feel not very strongly about it all, to five meaning you have very strong feelings about me getting top surgery. Now, please fold up your answers and put them in your pocket. Please keep them to yourself, as I will try to do with my feelings about your breasts. Thank you so much for participating. (GF83)

*

Given how little writing I have found about the mastectomy experience itself, I am more confident than ever that this fleshy trans-formation only becomes such when circulated and tied to gender. Yet this missing story feels important to tell.

It was my first time having surgery and my first time receiving anesthesia, which left me in a state of ambient, manageable anxiety. When we arrived at the hospital at six a.m. (I had gotten up at four), it was hardly light out yet. I was terrified the entire time that the surgery would, for some reason, be called off.

I undressed on arrival, put on the requisite nightgown, and laid on a table. Several nurses tended to me. I spoke nervously to my mother, who joined me in the preparation room. I signed a liability waiver because I didn't feel like taking out all of my piercings. My arm, still in moderate-to-severe levels of pain from my fall days prior, was tucked safely at my side. When the nurses asked if there was anything they needed to be aware of, my mind said, "you'd better not fuck this up," and my mouth said, "my arm is a little sore, but that's it."

The most unnerving part of that morning was the realization that I was laying, hooked to an I.V., on top of a wheeled bed. I was to be pushed and positioned by white coats whose faces I sometimes couldn't see. I was naked but for a gown. My stomach felt like the first day of school.

It was as if it were my mom and me in the car once more, surrounded on both sides by vast, manure-smelling fields and bookended by a small dairy farm. The hill we drove over felt to my six-year-old self like a roller coaster. My panic always crested with it. When the bed began to move and I was surrounded by nurses and white walls, I wanted to jump out of my skin, though the powerful opioid I had been given just prior made me instead feel heavy. The anesthesiologist made small talk with me in the hallway, offered me a mask of “extra oxygen.” I was out in seconds.

When I woke up, I was confused and then frustrated. I simply couldn't manage to stay awake. My eyes would crack open and I'd see a blur of white and pale, and the moment I blinked I would be asleep again. I hated being so wantonly exposed to the disturbing fact of my own non-autonomy, the way my body had just sat on the table like a brick, alive and unconscious, for hours, without me. This inability to stay conscious was new and frightening: not the feeling of eyes-closing exhaustion we feel propped up with a book, warm and blanketed. Rather, it was like two oiled fingers pressing roughly on my eyelids.

My mood only worsened when a well-intentioned nurse walked by, saw me struggling to peer at the expanse of white and blinking light around me, and said, “close your eyes, honey, it's fine.” (It did not feel fine.)

Eventually, I again found myself able to keep my eyes open and my thoughts coherent. I had the vague impression of being wheeled through several hallways, into and out of an elevator, and through a door, although from where I sit now I can't recall whether that memory is from before or after the surgery. Either way, post-op, I found myself, too, in a private room in the chil-

drens' wing of the hospital. My mother sat on the couch. I was still attached to an IV, wrapped (ironically) in the tightest (and ugliest) binder — a chest-compression vest to prevent swelling — I had ever worn, and, beneath, stitched and bandaged. Below each of my armpits hung drains the approximate shape of Little Hug juice barrels and maybe a third of the size. Blood and other fluid leaked into both.

I was sore, still falling in and out of wake and sleep, aided by an album of folk music on shuffle — it was *Song Up in Her Head*, by another Sarah: Sarah Jarosz, who was only eighteen when the album, her first, was released. (A profound life transition, I'm sure). Her voice accompanied my dreams. I woken every thirty or sixty minutes by apologetic nurses on their rounds. Sometimes, they would glance at the machine attached to me and leave. Otherwise, they were there for the periodic bandage changes, the most uncomfortable part of that first day post-op. My gauze was always thick with blood; the carnage was such that even I, not usually squeamish, cringed and looked away. Most of all, I was happy, happy for *all this* (the breasts, the medical process, the operation itself) to be over. Yet I feared others' disappointment that I was not happy enough. (I had resentfully watched videos of trans men crying after their own mastectomies prior to my own.) I feared that my mother would doubt my legitimacy. I feared the burden of collective regret, based on wrongfully assumed dissatisfaction. I feared everyone would look at my non- or muted- reaction and see someone profoundly unworthy, unworthy of their trans, unworthy of their insurance coverage, unworthy of their time.

The following morning, the daytime nurse asked if I wanted a picture. I was excited to see the results and agreed immediately. She undid my bandages, emptying my drains before the photo, and I was delighted to see far less blood than there had been the day before. My scars

were thick and red, my drains still full, but my body looked a bit less like a murder scene. I felt the most pain in my nipples, still tightly covered by thick pieces of gauze, and appearing — from what little I could see — to be massive scabs containing every color from yellow to red to brown and black. I hoped this would not come through in the photo. I hoped that, when I saw the photo, it would feel right.

I struggle to describe what I felt looking at the tiny captured image of myself, hospital johnny and bandages wide open, gauze on my nipples, and chest — for the first time (in forever) — flat, marked only by vertical lines of what looked to be permanent marker. My friends commented on my smile that day, how unique it was from every other smile they have seen on me.

I don't know if that's true. I don't know if dysphoria is intrinsic or learned, or how much of each makes me who I am. I don't know what parts of my body-hate are and are not related to my gender, nor even how one would go about delineating. I don't know if I would have kept my breasts if my life had gone a different way, if I had been a butch before I became trans, if I lived in a mythical world where gender had no bearing on social status. All I know is that I am grateful for my chest like I am grateful for oxygen: a necessity whose edges, if we are lucky, we can pretend do not exist.

Interlude: Choosing Nothing

At a recent medical appointment, I had to tell the technician seeing me that I was on testosterone. I was about to get a bone density scan. The technician asked me first, “what do you want me to put you as?”

I, genuinely misunderstanding, said, “uh, I’m Sarah? And I’m twenty?”

She said, “I mean...should I put M or F?”

I explained to her that it depends on what she’s asking: hormonally, I’m a thirteen-year-old boy, but I still have ovaries, except no uterus. She spent at least ten subsequent minutes discussing the issue with her higher-ups, ended up “running me as both.”

We made casual conversation while awaiting the results. She asked me (*if I didn’t mind her asking*) “if I was a [long pause] FtM?” A fair enough question, in my view. I was dressed boyishly and she was at least fifty and clearly trying.

I said, “no, I’m neither.”

“So, you’re transitioning to...”

“—transitioning to nothing.”

She squinted at me, but politely declined to respond.

Before the bureaucrats can sign off on the form and send it to the surgeon, a psychologist and a psychiatrist must first decide if they believe me that I am who I say I am. In order to do this, I must fill out a long multiple-choice questionnaire, which the psychologist that my doctor referred me to will read through and assess, and then refer me to a psychiatrist for a proper diagnosis. Because someone who is trained in this stuff has to sign off that I do in fact have a bona fide gender identity disorder, but that someone cannot be me, because I am not qualified. *And by gender identity disorder, they all mean that you want to be a man. Or a woman, as the case may be. It is not enough to just feel that you are not a woman or a man. You must want to be not the box that they have all previously put you in. There is no box to check for not wanting a box at all. No one knows how to fix that.*”

Ivan E. Coyote. “Gender Failure.” (79) [emphasis mine]

Coyote & Bergman: Walking the Identificatory Trail

Many of us grow up in the shadow of a concentrated absence, fillable by words we do not (yet) know. Although somewhat less of a problem in an age of increasingly-publicized LGBTQ+ narratives, as well as increased access to fellow questioning young people on social media, terminological absence — hermeneutical injustice — remains central in many transbutch stories, including my own. The ongoing conflict between first words that fill this absence and those that arrive later results from teleological understandings of transition and self-discovery, in which the newest term is inherently more progressive than the former terms — thus preparing a discursive battlefield in which transbutches are caught in the crossfire. And, as Bergman writes, “a classifier often cannot know exactly what they’ve got until a subject is dead” (NE93).

The desperation for a “field guide, [a] magical guide of taxonomic determinations that will tell you exactly what you are, or are dealing with [...] what pronoun to use [...] who [you] are permitted to be attracted to” has led me to conceptualize transbutch coming-to-terms as a *trail* rather than a path (TNE93). Unlike the word *path*, whose definition suggests a destination, schedule, program, and order (and whose resemblance to words like “pathology” suggest movement toward cure or disease), *trail* is first defined as “a mark or a series of signs or objects left behind by the passage of someone or something.” A trail can be started and exited in many places, and can remain itself despite containing numerous markers, each affixed to a different tree. This will help me to trouble typical understandings of “coming to terms,” within trans(/)butch narratives, particularly the notion that lesbianism is an early-form of trans man-

hood, but also the equally-harmful counterpoint that transmasculinity is merely a misguided butch lesbianism, a butchness that went off-course.⁷

Regardless of past-or-present identity, Bergman's and Coyote's experiences walking the transbutch trail perform and describe the term's motion and multiplicity. For Coyote, this involves a pointed resistance to "butch flight" narratives, instead painting their transbutch process as a return to the tomboyishness they always sought, and using words as a medium to both prove and celebrate their "tomboy-transbutch survival". On the other hand, Bergman invokes a genderqueer literary lineage that *trails* his present-day manhood, rather than merely being left in the past. These transformations as enrich, rather than upset, his present identity, itself an ongoing project of definition and redefinition — never quite knowing "what [trans]butch is" (BAAN15).

Coyote's narrative, particularly in *Tomboy Survival Guide* (TBSG) is unique in its circularity. That is not to say that no self-discovery happens, but that, hence the title, Coyote's becoming is in many ways a journey into what seems like the past, their childhood. It is the return to (a now-mature) tomboyism, an adult tomboyism — butchness — for which they previously lacked the words. The reconstruction of their pre-puberty chest, the reformulation and reassessment of their sometimes-painful memories of "failed girlhood," and identity-performance via the illustrated presentation of markers of tomboyhood that allow them to simultaneously move beyond "butch womanhood" and refuse to disclaim it. They can simultaneously move beyond "she" and not erase it from their story. Rather than merely documenting their "progress" from being girled to refusing womanhood, Coyote's narrative turns cyclical even as they mark life-milestones with

⁷ Levitt, Heidi M., and Katherine R. Hiestand. "A Quest for Authenticity: Contemporary Butch Gender." *Sex Roles*, vol. 50, no. 9/10, 2004, pp. 620., doi:10.1023/b:sers.0000027565.59109.80.

their childhood likenesses. Their transbutchness is critically connected to their tomboyism, the return to which is possible if and only if a trans embodiment and identity are established.

TBSG opens with Coyote occupying a temporary “child-gender,” or “*ante-gender*” — the tomboy — whose existence permits young “girls” to defer an adherence to the demands of womanhood.⁸ The cultural availability of tomboy-gender gave their family members a safe lens through which to see their difference. This tomboyishness was, Coyote knew (“before [they] even knew what knowing was”) an element of their truth that had long gone unseen and unnamed by the family, whose tacit toleration of their deviation had limits (TBSG16). Enjoying being mistaken for a boy, Coyote went “shirtless in the summers,” and at swimming lessons; the outdoors a place of freedom and pleasure without the gender-surveillance to which they would later be subjected (TBSG129). Boyhood was the only language available through which to interpret their love of shirtlessness, their affinity for activities only boys seemed to enjoy — or, only boys were *allowed* to enjoy. Tomboyishness, for them, was not located in age, look, or even activity, but rather in the autonomy young girled-people were not granted.

Like many tomboy narratives, Coyote’s at first appears doomed. After they begin to receive verbal confirmation of their passing-boyhood, their mother began to force them into dresses, a literal restriction of the freedom of their shirtless youth (TBSG153). Puberty, too, heralded a traumatic fissure between ante-gender childhood and the bodily-alienation and tightening restriction of womanhood. This fissure was not only between they and their body, but they and the women they cared about: the emergent woman-gender of their friends amplified as their own refused to manifest. As they and their friends enter eighth grade, they narrate this transition with a

⁸ Jalas, Kristiina. "Between Tomboys and Butch Lesbians: Gender Nonconformity Viewed Through Clinical Psychoanalysis and Lesbian AND Gay Theory." *Psychoanalytic review* 90.5 (2003): 655-83. ProQuest. Web.

telling change in terminology, asking of their former-tomboy close friend Janine, “Who was this *new girl*, anyway? And what had she done with my friend who only liked blue jeans or brown cords, just like me?” [emphasis mine] (GF27). The transition Janine experiences is not merely from “girl to woman,” but from “friend to girl” — friend, like tomboy, signified a space of gender-liminality. With her transition to “girl” via (first-)puberty, Janine seals both her own and Coyote’s fate. Coyote feels friendless, because as they grow, the figure of “friend” becomes unthinkable without gender attached. Without a lens through which to see “adult tomboyishness,” Coyote assumed their increasing bodily and social alienation to be inevitable. Without a word or role model, butchness was subsumed into general gender-deviance, perceivable only in the negative. No longer a tomboy, Coyote became a failed-woman, “uncomfortable in [their] own skin” in a way they and their family lacked the words to describe (TBSG215). Becoming a transbutch — realizing terminological possibility — was not simply a progression from girlhood to something else, but a realization that would allow them to continue themselves and repair that pubescent fissure.

Becoming a butch and then a transbutch was the way Coyote realized their tomboyishness was not doomed, but merely in need of adjustments as they aged. In reproducing their response to a message from a reader questioning their gender, Coyote both asserts a “born-this-way”-style narrative, while also subverting ideas of the “wrong-body”. They argue that their childhood body *was* the right body, but then it was hijacked: not simply by puberty but by the body-aggression and ostracism that accompanied flesh-transitions. They were born and initially grew into a tomboy-body, and any later transitions could not simply move forward into an unknown but instead cite the true-self they had begun life in. Their top surgery was “foreshadowed

in their [five-year-old] frame”(142). The scars they acquired as a young tomboy — from an ill-fated jump into the pool, from tobogganing, from stepping hard on a rusty nail — are listed in conversation with the “two semi-circles, one on either side of [their] chest, where [their] breasts used to be” (TBSG185-188). Once separated from the natural world they grew up in by layers of clothes and body/gender-based restrictions (I first wrote “descriptions”), imposed by girlhood, top surgery provided the possibility of return. Though no longer able to “feel the cold lake or the warm sun” (I first wrote “sun”) on their chest, they again access the liberty they “always knew” they needed, shirtless once more as they “run, or swim, or dance, or fuck, or ride [their] bike really hard” (TBSG191). Their “body remembers [...] the unexamined freedom of being in [their] younger body before it changed and grew and swelled to become something else” (TBSG200-201). Rather than “fleeing” into transness from butchness, they returned into that nameless state of their youth, christening it *butch* (TBSG142). “Coming to terms,” comes to refer not to achieving truth but circling back, an act grounded not in result but process.

In the act of writing and in the presentations they give at schools, Coyote re-performs the coming-to-terms they have had to undergo, this time re-experiencing it via the children to whom they present. Part of the way they come to terms with their own transbutchness is by continuously supplying evidence that a transbutch future is possible, is happening already *now*. Between their own narrative, they intersperse vignettes taken from times meeting with trans youth, usually at one of their school performances. In one, Coyote promises to send books to a struggling two-spirit high schooler, a metaphoric compensation for the lack of queer and trans material they received as a child (TBSG216). The form and contents of *Tomboy Survival Guide* itself do this work: connecting “past” and “possible” for readers as well as reinforcing Coyote’s own continu-

ity; better yet, *simultaneity*. “That little boy at school that the bigger kids are picking on. Ask him if he has a secret name he wants you to call him. Tell him yours. Tell him he is beautiful,” they write, the mere phrase “secret name” giving voice to a host of possibilities previously unimaginable (144). The book carries on the work to which Coyote has chosen to devote their life: making language serve them.

Though illustrated liberally with diagrams illustrating methods of knot-tying, the guidance TBSG provides lies in the stories it provides readers, although some of these stories run the risk of advancing a clichéd narrative of transbutchness. This raises questions about the implications of the tomboy-childhood trope, which I will address in greater detail elsewhere. Clichés notwithstanding, Coyote’s past-and-ongoing tomboyishness produces a lived-continuity in their story, rather than separating their life into “pre-” and “post-” transition. Instead, for them, “transitioning” is a coming-back to self. Their body of work does indeed function as a survival guide, and also a proof-of-survival document; a testament to Coyote’s selfhood. To name a book *Tomboy Survival Guide* is both to guide young tomboys and also to prove tomboyhood is survivable, that a tomboy can grow up and become something other than a woman: a tomboy can come gracefully, successfully, to terms with transbutchness.

In centering relationality and honoring change, Coyote and Bergman refuse the “border” that a backslash in “trans(/)butch” would invoke. Unlike Coyote, who narrated this ongoing process as a circling-back to selfhood, S. Bear Bergman’s trail uses identities as building blocks, some of which are higher up than others, but all of which are required for a secure structure. Born in 1974, Bergman began his queer life as a butch and became a trans man. I was at first

frustrated with Bergman had me frustrated at him, bristling not because he “abandoned” butchness, but rather because it appeared that he *grew out of* genderqueerness (I am quite touchy, in part out of fear for myself, about the notion that someday most of us will settle down with a nice gender and stop this troublemaking)⁹. Still, it is impossible to frame Bergman’s manhood as a form of “flight,” given that his activism trails him wherever he goes. Rather, moving into trans manhood is for Bergman a way of “living *into* [him]self,” not departing; adjusting his personal markers in order to better articulate his (desired and lived) relationships with others and the world, including his role as a teacher and purveyor of trans-possibility.

Interactions with others facilitate Bergman’s own identity-making process. Much of *Butch is a Noun* is devoted not simply to describing Bergman’s butchness, but also to describing his interactions with femmes and other butches, wherein his own butch position is implied and invented. He calls this gender-interactivity “[erotic] traction,” which occurs when we observe our partner(s)’ identities and “push off of that, or against it...[to find] a place to play” (BAAN 44). First, he finds this in butch/femme culture: he carries a handkerchief, imagining the prospect of “the most fastidious femme thing [he] know[s] putting it to her face” (BAAN 71). He locates his own desire to bind his breasts in the binding-performance of butch performer Peggy Shaw, who compares the emotional protecting binding provides with a boxer who wraps their hands before a fight (BAAN51).

He emerged into young-butchness via such interactions, first online and then later off. With the help of “old-school femmes,” that populated early internet chats, Bergman learned butchness, and more than that, “that [his] attraction to femmes made [him] a butch and not in any

⁹ I didn’t think he was lying about being a man, it was that in this case, the truth was even “worse”: for some people, being genderqueer really *is* a stepping stone from one gender to another, and if that is so, what does it mean for me?

way a het girl *or* a het guy” (BAAN85). Additionally, his “lessons from an elder butch” allowed him to do his butchness citationally, demonstrating the importance of modeling in claiming of identity terms: he is butch because he locates himself among butches, and locates in older butches (especially his mentor, Uncle Pam) a shared and ongoing history that he is interested in sharing with them. His non-manhood was a key element of his engagement in this gender play, one of its primary goals being “queer visibility” (BAAN58). Although at times he enjoyed passing as a man, especially given his size — not being served Diet Coke when he wanted regular; not facing the levels of disgust a woman might when asking for a seatbelt extension on a plane — he also wrote, “Sir is a man, and I am a butch,” drawing a hard terminological line he would later disrupt (BAAN56-57).

Although at first able to find an (uncomfortable) home in butchness, Bergman later realizes with his attraction to queer masculinities the term’s insufficiency. In contrast to butches like Uncle Pam, Bergman’s masculinity shines in relation with other queer masculinities, a relationship that faces stigma and erasure in the face of “lesbo [sic] sexual mores or butch/femme cultural restrictions” (TNE165). Bergman never considered himself a lesbian (though occasionally a dyke), but felt queer attraction toward woman; this singular commitment to queerness ended up paramount to his identity, even while his gender changed (TNE71). Again, terminological choice becomes both political and social, instead of a journey to “inner-truth,” as Bergman’s manhood and gayness would not exist without each other. “I never touched a man with any sexual intentions until I was one myself (or a near facsimile thereof)” he writes, pressing himself against “manhood” when and only when he prefaces that manhood with sufficient queerness (TNE164). His attraction to men, long dormant, became enactable as *gay* once he was also a man; loving

men “homo-style” (TNE165). Now, there is ample language for his effeminacy, which used to simply add caveats and questions to his butch-reality. Now, a butchness once conferred “on credit” alone was absorbed into — but not erased by — a broader, queer, trans masculinity (TNE69).

This is complicated by the activist role Bergman’s identification took while he was genderqueer and the perception that by no longer identifying with genderqueerness/butchness, Bergman therefore no longer fights on “our” behalf. While Bergman’s past experience as a butch facilitated the “queer visibility” he aimed to spread, language itself becoming a vehicle for activism (BAAN58). Later, as a man, he explains his ultimate choice to use he/him pronouns instead of ze/hir as informed by changing political priorities *as well as* new relationships. He writes on his current website:

I carried that banner [ze/hir pronouns] for ten years in my public/professional life, because I thought I could make more space in the world for the gender-nonspecific pronouns...[But] my actual lived experience moved me way out of gender-nonspecific-pronoun-land and two, it seems like language is moving toward adopting the singular they, much more than ze and hir. So I am putting that banner down and devoting my energy to different language issues around sex and gender, like getting people to understand that they’re not the same thing.

While still committed to his educational project, Bergman refused to ignore his changing personal relationships. While not giving up his activism by any means, he also suggests that a change in the language he uses, and the change in identity it heralds, does necessarily change (but not

erase) political priorities. Contrary to typical narratives of butchness-to-trans manhood, his manhood does not mark the end of his activism, even if he is no longer actively participating in the activist projects he did as a genderqueer person. Instead, his activism lingers in the form of the lives he has impacted, the books he has written and the organizing he has done. Though he is “putting that banner down,” his genderqueer impact lingers everywhere, including in this thesis.

Bergman prioritizes the impact his labels have on those who engage with them when choosing his terminology. However, rather than simply a perpetual-teacher, I frame Bergman as a subject who carries knowledge and experience from a variety of periods in his life, holding them open for others to learn from. He moves across without negation, enacting a transition wherein both points A and Z are literally citable. Rather than transitioning in order to leave behind an old, butch self in favor of a new trans self (or claiming he was never really butch in the first place), Bergman is always in the process of “liv[ing] into [him]self” (TNE20). He is a *transman of butch experience*, a trans man who is proud of his butch past, and whose butch past continues to inform his present and future. His coming-to-terms neither circles back to specific childhood desires nor erases the past as inherently wrong. Instead, it stacks his collective experiences, making him the composite of every identity he has been, every lesson he has taught and learned, and every relationship he has been in.

Bergman’s relationship to the terms of his existence is always in motion, is temporally and politically contingent. It certainly does not spring from some intrinsic inner-self that, as trans people, we are expected to cite in justifying our existence. Instead, Bergman’s stories reveal our discovery of identity as occurring in tandem with, and informed by, our political and activist commitments, our intimate and community relationships, and our capacity to use these words —

including *transbutch* — to communicate knowledge to others. With each name Bergman collects and connects with, he is able to “[walk] through a door into a whole different kind of possibility,” and possibly show others the way (TNE21).

Unbecoming Tomboys

The tomboy is a loved and hated figure, a symbol of youthful vitality tinged with eugenics, *and* of “peculiar” girlhood, potentially even afflicted by “childhood transvestitism.”^{10 11} Regardless of whether the tomboy is glorified for their ability to bear (white) healthy children in the future, or merely accepted with the knowledge that they will one day be heterosexually married, the tomboy is valued only for the future they can offer. With the presumption that the tomboy will not survive, boyish freedom is temporarily permissible as an alternative path to a cis, straight future, prized in many ways precisely for its haunting expiration date, once boyishness “stop[s] being cute,” and instead becomes a threat to cisheterosexuality and to the nuclear family (XY244). The narrative of the free, cis-threatening tomboy is thus a quintessential part of the transbutch narrative playbook, wherein gender-crossing is an extension of and tribute to “natural” youthful masculinity.¹² This is especially true given the tomboy’s typical prepubescent age, meaning that tomboyishness is practiced without complex awareness of queer and gender politics: Toshi Reagon writes, “I was three the first time I told my mom I did not like to wear dresses” (XY4).

It is tempting to frame tomboyhood as instinctual. Many transbutches find recourse to a shared narrative, particularly in the circulation of the pastoral childhood scenes so common to tomboy stories. However, this doubly-natural (both inherent and inherently-associated-with-nature) framing advances an essentialist approach to gender as potentially-harmful as “dysphoria”:

¹⁰ Chauncey, 119-120.

¹¹ King, Elizabeth. “A Short History of the Tomboy.” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 5 Jan. 2017, www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/01/tomboy/512258/.

¹² Jalas, 2003.

the absence of a tomboy story would seem to call a transbutch's legitimacy into question. In the following section, I compare and contrast two tomboy narratives, Rae Spoon's and Ivan Coyote's, to look both at clichés of tomboy childhood and the tensions that underlie them. How are two somewhat-similar transbutches, both tomboys as children, shaped by unique sets of social conditions, and what do clichés do to conceal these uniquenesses? Then, I will look at my own childhood experience as a non-tomboy and urge readers to think through other modes of becoming-transbutch, as well as understanding the complexities which distinguish even seemingly-similar tomboy stories from each other. What are the profound differences lurking beneath the surface of seemingly-similar tomboy stories, and whose stories remain untold in a tomboy-dominated narrative landscape?

We can look to Ivan Coyote's narrative as a paradigmatic tomboy story, confirmed by the telling title of their *Tomboy Survival Guide*. Coyote paints a symbolic tomboyhood both they and those around them recognize long before it is defined as such. Their origin story begins at age five, swelling with pride when they were mistaken for a boy on a camping trip (TBSG15). While their mother is offended and ashamed of this, Coyote's writes of their father's recognition of their nascent masculinity, citing his cavalier attitude toward one of their bicycle accidents as evidence that he knew Coyote was not like "every little girl in the whole wide world" (TBSG 31-36; 44). Coyote also spends years bargaining to wear pants to school, after an initial bewilderment that they were expected to want to emulate Princess Diana, often on their T.V. screen. In contrast to these expectations, Coyote spends their childhood learning what seems antithetical to the image of the "princess": working with bolt and outlets, holding an axe, and other skills that would later be printed as images in *Tomboy Survival Guide* (TBSG184; 164-165; 168, 144).

Though Coyote claims that these images and activities “have no gender,” they continue to gender them, placing them in direct opposition with princess-like femininity. They become part of a *tomboy* skillset, a desire for which “thrums in [their] heart” (TBSG145). Thus, childhood tomboyishness become “natural” precursors to a masculine — transbutch — adulthood (TBSG83-84; 139; 153).

The outdoors functions as a backdrop for the learning of these skills, and the often-defiant realization of one’s tomboy identity, both a site of freedom and of exile. On one hand, the outdoors is a direct counterpoint to “the home,” a space traditionally associated with womanhood, femininity, and attendant patriarchal expectations. This is especially acute for Rae Spoon, who flees outdoors in order to escape the demands of their Pentecostal family (GF50-51). “Instead of thinking too much about my impending womanhood,” they write, “I often ran to a ravine located on the hill above our house, the only place nearby that was covered in trees...*I felt lighter the more I ran*” [emphasis mine] (GF56). Lighter, free of the material and ideological binds of cisheteropatriarchy, when running into the wilderness from the impossible expectations of womanhood at home. While not facing the same pressures from their family, Coyote also feels safer to be a tomboy outside hostile, binarily-labeled gender enclosures, especially the women’s restroom, their own version of Rae Spoon’s hostile, impossible house. Predicting the bathroom struggles which figure heavily into transbutch stories of ambiguous, unreliable “passage”, Coyote recounts demands to cover their flat, seven-year-old chest in the “women’s showers,” citing their discomfort as evidence that they were meant to have a flat chest all along. For both Coyote and Spoon, the outdoors is a space outside the normalizing gendered gaze as well as gendered expectations, emblemized by Coyote’s curtainless childhood house on the Yukon — there was

no one to look inside. However, the conditions from which Coyote and Spoon flee toward queer freedom have marked differences, revealing Coyote's as a story of innate tomboyhood and Spoon's of tomboyhood by necessity.

Unlike Coyote, who took on tomboyhood as a chosen path despite its innate roots, Spoon spent their youth as a tomboy trying desperately and failing to live up to impossible girlhood-expectations. Being a girl was "something that never really happened to [Spoon]," yet their perceived-boyish activities were looked on by girls with pity and scorn (GF31). When Spoon hurts themselves attempting to imitate boys' pull-ups in gym class, a girl comments, "Hey, it's okay, I used to want to be a boy too" (GF32). The girl both temporalizes (attempted) tomboyhood as childish and to be grown out of, and also gestures at Spoon's aforementioned failed girlhood. This is the counterpoint to Coyote's tomboy story, wherein they watch former friends grow into unrecognizable "girls" as their own tomboyhood survives. Following the pull-up incident, Spoon engages in those oft-cited feminine rituals, trying to method-act themselves into girlhood: they, like me, shaved their legs far earlier than they were expected to (GF33). Pubescent tomboy Coyote observed the girls, their razors and their perms, they stood back in quiet refusal, and even resentment, seeming to seal their adulthood-queerness. Spoon, on the other hand, did all they could to curb their tomboy tendencies, spending their childhood believing themselves to be a failed straight girl, rather than someone with a transbutch future.

The differences between Spoon's and Coyote's narratives are not limited to differences in effort at girlhood, but also informed by vastly different social conditions. Spoon did not simply flee into the wilderness to bare their natural self, but to escape an impossible set of expectations placed on them and other girls by their religious-extremist family. They learned early that their

chore-load was exponentially heavier than a boys', that they must not sit with their legs open, and that they needed to police their bodily functions (GF49-51). They identify this experience as "female socialization"¹³. Unlike others who claim the term, including TERFs, Spoon does not identify their experience as universal, instead specifying it as "female socialization *in [their] family*" [emphasis mine] (GF51). This socialization is specific, as all gendered-socialization is: Spoon's tomboyishness is just one response to his social and familial experiences, not an assured outcome nor the result of an imagined "nature." Spoon's efforts at girling himself, which Coyote does not engage in, are also a result of this drastic difference in socialization despite their shared "femaleness." While Spoon's was a girlhood made out of walls and restrictions, from which tomboyhood (and butchness, and manhood) constituted escapes, Coyote's nonconformity was permitted and limitedly encouraged.

Predictions for Coyote's and Spoon's futures were also drastically different. Spoon was expected to be "barefoot and pregnant" as an adult, the victim of desperate parental attempts to strip them of all impulse and autonomy (GF51). Their relative isolation, childhood of abuse, and steep housework and childcare expectations made womanhood into an inescapable trap into which they were stuck, but could not fit. They began transitioning to manhood because the activities and freedom they enjoyed were available only to the men around them; womanhood, the other option, was uninhabitable. In contrast, Coyote, who was surrounded from childhood with women who managed "most of the practical details of everyday life" asserts that their tomboyhood is more inherent than socially-produced (TBSG19). They write of "femme tomboys" and invoke a diversity in tomboy experience despite shared essence (TBSG133). Rather than merely

¹³ A term since weaponized by TERFs in order to exclude so-called "male socialized" trans women from their apparently-pure women's space.

wanting to escape girlhood, they viscerally *knew* of what would become their transbutchness: “I didn’t not want to be a girl because I had been told that they were weaker or somehow lesser than boys... *I just always knew that I wasn’t*. I couldn’t. I would never be” (TBSG19) [emphasis mine]. Where Spoon’s tomboyhood was circumstantial and reactive, Coyote’s appears essential and inevitable.

*

Like Coyote, I did not receive the message that girls were lesser than boys. My parents, both working, also enjoyed an equal division of housework. Early on, it was actually my father who did the bulk of the cleaning. They allowed me to dress as I pleased, play with what I wanted, and I did: dinosaurs, dolls, legos, dragons, makeup, and those early-aughts dress-up games you hooked up to the T.V. I spent a lot of time on the Internet, and not enough outside. I took dance and soccer; riding and figure skating, but by adolescence spent most of my time reading and writing, finding in words an escape not from the eyes of others, but from my own body-consciousness. Yet the thought of becoming a boy did not occur to me. Shortly after my great-aunt came out as trans, I mused to my grandmother one day about how impossible it seemed for me to transition: “*Imagine* wanting to be a *boy!*” It seemed absurd. I think I felt more alienation at the thought of boyhood than I felt attachment to girlhood, even though, at the time, I knew myself to be a girl.

My grandmother, a cis straight woman through and through, was similarly bewildered. She added that she felt the same way about becoming a lesbian. “I’m a woman, and I love men,” she said. “I really do. I enjoy being a heterosexual woman and I really can’t imagine not being one.”

At the time, I was kicking a half-inflated balloon back and forth across her living room. She sipped black coffee on the couch. I was surprised at her comment, suddenly self-conscious.

“Well,” my young-self hedged, “I can see the lesbian thing. I mean, liking girls. It’s not that hard to understand...like, I could imagine being a lesbian, *theoretically*. It just doesn’t seem so unbelievable.”

My queerness seems obvious in hindsight, but with the dominance of the tomboy narrative and my own enjoyment of American Girl dolls, *Teen Vogue*, and perfume counters, I don’t think there was much of a reason for others to think about it. Most of my friends were girls, only a few were boys. Some of the girls were tomboys, and I envied them, because it seemed like they were having fun. I occasionally joined them on the rope swing (usually from the sidelines, as I was afraid of getting injured) or in a game of capture the flag, and it was fun for a while. When they went out to play in the mud with frogs, I declined.

I also loved being around, or imagining myself as, a Pretty Girl. I figured that if I was going to be a girl, I should be the perfect kind, and I spent several years ignoring latent masculine interests. My fourth grade school picture has me with painstakingly straightened hair and earrings. Though it was over eighty degrees that August day, I insisted on wearing a pink sweater with what appeared to be a white blouse underneath, paired with a black plaid skirt. Knee highs, Mary Janes, and an ornate clip thick enough to hold my then-long hair. I walked purposefully past one girl, whose girlhood I admired deeply. She knew how to knit and paint her nails, even her right hand. Her hair was pin-straight. I took my time passing her, complementing her pointedly on the fresh balls of yarn she was placing in her locker.

I could never be like her, but I was still a girl, albeit not a very good one. It isn't that there were unmanageable expectations set on me, but rather that it seemed all the other girls intuited I wasn't-quite-right. This was manageable until it was time for me to be a woman, an adult gender that one had to claim in some sense. While "boy" and "girl" were happenstance things to be fallen (born, assigned) into, "man" and "woman" were conscious. They have consequences.

I knew it was possible to be any kind of woman I wanted to be: masculine, feminine; rolex-and-suit-wearing or Subaru-driving or even housewifing. I didn't feel that a "real" woman had to be straight, cis (had I known the word at the time), married, a mother, or anything else. I didn't become trans because I thought there were limits to what a woman could be. Instead, I knew that whatever I would be, woman was an impossible lens through which to view it. The body I was being womaned into was entirely unclaimable, and manhood was equally foreign. Instead I renounced gender, albeit at the time without full awareness of what that renunciation meant.

I don't say all this to assert that the tomboy is completely detached from the transbutch, nor that the tomboy themselves is not both a gender-crosser and the result of an act of crossing. Nor do I want to claim that transbutches should not revel in their tomboy childhoods: we all deserve to value, discuss, and learn from the quilt of experiences that produced the people we are. Instead, I say all this to remind myself and others that identity is a trail, not a path, and that non-adherence to the tomboy story does not mean I am lost. I also do so to preserve the radical potential of the tomboy, which disappears — as the promise of trans radicalism disappears — once they are incorporated into a normalizing discourse of transbutch teleology; denies us agency in our own self-creation. While many unsatisfied with girlhood may become tomboys and later

trans(/)butches, this is not a result of inherent, diagnosable non-conformity. Where is our joyful, willful queerness when transbutch lives are stripped to inevitabilities of biology or childhood socialization? Rather than being a paradigmatic transbutch experience, I have argued for the tomboy as one of many possible manifestations of queer childhood, influenced most heavily not by innate proclivity toward transbutchness but instead by social conditions, about the differing expectations and preferences of different young people, and — most importantly — by the fact that any gender experience can lead to transbutchness.

Queer Re(-)creation: The Transbutch Approach

Our Personal Names

Names are a culturally located way of gesturing to one's "essence" using nothing but sound (NE 57). Thus, it's no wonder the "parlor game" of learning trans peoples' birth names is so common among cis people, who often understand the name as shorthand for sexgender essence (NE 55). "Real name" is shorthand for "real gender," which is shorthand for "real sex," which is shorthand, again, for the genitalia the doctor saw at one's birth. Although outside the scope of this paper, I suggest that cis fixation on trans names (and trans genitalia) stems from an impulse to surveil the bodyminds of those marked socially-psychiatrically deviant, a form of gender-based "neighborhood watch" that follows us to our bathrooms, to our schools — including historically-single-sexgender colleges such as Mount Holyoke — and to our deaths. Uncovering/recovering the real-name suggests the recovery of a hidden biology beneath trans "artifice." We use names to conjure ourselves; others use names to (re)call who we are.

With such weight attached to naming, a name-change comes to signify a radical self-transformation. In the case of binary transition (for which a name change is almost always necessary and usually desired), this is a swapping of selves: "Marie was no more. Now it was Mario," Martino writes; his old name becoming a deadname as he swaps for its conventionally-masculine counterpart. While Martino includes his birth name (the value-neutral term for deadname) and pretransition photographs in *Emergence*, a move not conventional among contemporary trans people and narratives, this does not impede his project: the weight of the name-change does not lie in the rejected name itself, but the disavowal of the past it suggests. It is for this reason that

name changes are so expected of trans subjects: if transition is believed to be a cure for dysphoria-as-sickness, then all symptoms of that sickness must be removed.

Professionals and laypeople have come to take part in anticipating a form of de-facto compulsory name-change for people who cross gender. If we are unable or unwilling to select our *true* name, such “failures of language” to adequately capture (if we want to be captured) our experiences are instead blamed on imagined personal failings (XY244). I know this experience intimately. I’m Sarah, I’m not a woman, I used to be a girl, I’m diagnosed as dysphoric, I’m missing some secondary sex characteristics, I’m a lesbian, I was saddled with this name and this gendered torch at birth and only accepted one of them. I get increasingly-uncomfortable looks when my name is called and it’s me, with my clothes and my body, who rises in response — especially when I’m in a gatekept, transmedical space.

*

“When are you going to change your name?”¹⁴

A nurse asked me this after yanking out drains from either side of my chest, less than two weeks after my mastectomy. I hope never to experience that sensation again, as if a spare organ was being suddenly extracted.

I was on my way to the waiting room where my mother sat reading, knowing that I would first be stopped to take an “after” picture, my consent to which — like the “before” picture (*for their files*) — was not requested but assumed.

¹⁴ XY245; I was asked the same question verbatim.

“My name? Oh — I haven’t decided yet,” I replied after a stunned moment. I walked away quickly after that. Mere weeks ago, this nurse and her colleagues were the ones regularly calling me “she” within earshot, and now they were upset my name was Sarah?

Once my shock dissipated, I imagined the quips I could have toss back. “You can call me ‘Sam,’ if it really makes you feel better.” Ultimately I held my tongue, knowing I wanted a hysterectomy later on, knowing I couldn’t afford to be out of anyone’s good graces just yet.

A month later, just before leaving for my semester studying in Amsterdam, I returned for another check-up, grateful to have since resumed simple luxuries like stand-up showers rather than sponge-baths.

This time, a different nurse this time, I was hailed with a question: “...Sarah?”

On our walk back: “And that’s your preferred name?”

“Yes, thank you for asking,” I said, and I was thankful; I *am* thankful; if I were the unfortunate patient being called the incorrect name, I’m sure I would have appreciated that show of concern. Still, I bristled. I had no choice but to engage with the narrative being done to me, the story I had been asked to play a role in. Eager to change the subject, I began my usual medical-appointment routine, and soon I was cracking jokes and the nurse was laughing, gently probing my semicircular scars and calling me not Sarah but a *model patient*. I was healing *so quickly*.

*

Just as there are no true genders, nothing waiting at the bottom of our selves, there are no true names out waiting to be discovered. Even if someday I were to change my name, I would only, if anything, be finding a *better* thing to call myself, not the “right” thing. Without sexgender essentialism, without the belief that there is a perfect rightness hiding beneath our skins, the

idea of “true name” becomes meaningless. We must, instead, turn to narrative — to the stories of what and why we are called — to locate the relative-rightness of our names. We must also consider the social contexts in which names arise and are taken on, as well as the multifaceted, often-racialized implications of trans(/)butch name choice. Bergman troubles the convention of name-changing “upon transition,” having had their respective names long before (and outside of) entering medical transness. Bergman, in particular, performs refusal of the “deadname” convention without sensationalizing any aspects of his trans-formation. In addition, Kenji Tokawa in *Gender Outlaws* as well as Eddie Maisonet in *Outside the XY* illustrate the racial politics of trans name-changing, in which the recognized name-change necessarily follows white euro-american aesthetic and cultural conventions.

S. Bear Bergman was named *Bear* by two distinct groups of people who had had no contact with each other. He took the hint and kept it (NE58). This new name was not immediately attached to his transness; when he became Bear, he had not yet “[grown] into his gender”¹⁵ (NE57). Rather, he took time afterward to “become the person of [his] name,” the person his friends already saw within him (TNE60). At the same time, he allowed that tantalizing “S” to linger behind it in the titles of his books — referring to it as an “attractive nuisance,” both a simple expression of his identity and means of gender-troublemaking (TNE60). His name was not an inner-truth but an explicitly-relational term, the direct result of relationships with his chosen families. Rather than as a way to mark a border-line between his birth-self and present, Bear’s name is an acknowledgement of who and what is important to him, an ethos of naming that allows him

¹⁵ Comparable to the way in which any child named by their parents grows into or rejects their given name.

to continue using his first initial, and even (only around certain family members) full first name (NE59). Far from hiding his birth name, Bergman uses it several times in TNE, neither disclaiming the word nor submitting to it; neither marking it a “real name” nor “deadname.” Instead, he can be one name to his parents and elderly relatives and airport security, and another — better-suited to him — name with the rest, including the family that christened him Bear. Further, he can exclusively use Bear as a teacher-activist to illustrate to parents the importance of respecting trans names, anticipating that the liberal use of his “S.” would be seen as tacit permission for parents to deadname (colloquially used as a verb as well as a noun) their children (NE58-59).

Far from being individual indicators of dysphoria, names are political choices. As other elements of gender-crossing, however, such choices are more respectable when understood as inevitable results of a medical condition. Bergman uses knowledge of this as another way to resist trans convention, taking what might be called a “butch” (or preference-based; “non-dysphoric” according to the medical system) approach to name-change. As many butches have, Bergman changes his name to better acknowledge his community-position, not to prevent dysphoria “symptoms”. Though being asked his “real name” is as invasive as it is rude, Bergman bristles at the disrespectfulness of the question, one that cis people who take their spouses’ names, for example, don’t experience (NE60). Demands to know a trans person’s real name is not simply a “dysphoria trigger,” but an *indignity*; trans name changes are not simply a means of curing dysphoric embodiment but demanding the verbal recognition of others. Coyote’s story echoes this: the name “Ivan” is on their identity documents, and they wrote that they “wouldn’t think to turn around anymore” if someone called their birth name (TBSG176). Rather than simply triggering

gender dysphoria, Ivan writes that their family members' use of the incorrect name for them is an act of disrespect, causing them to "lose a little bit of [their] heart" each time (TBSG176).

The social indignities of misnaming are even more salient when also racialized, suggesting that the dysphoria-model of harm in misnaming obscures the degenerative element of mass disrespect to trans health. In response to being asked not if, but when, he was going to change his name, Eddie Maisonet wrote in *Outside the XY*: "not everyone is transitioning to be a white man" (XY245). While many, including Bergman with his "S." and me with my own, dispute the idea that transition requires the death of the former-self signified by a birth name, this resistance to severance takes on new meaning for Eddie. His family knows him as Edsuvani, neither his birth name nor his nickname have ever been presupposed or apolitical; purposeful as well as accidental, racialized misnaming has followed him throughout his life. "You can call me Eddie" transforms from a severance from cisness and positive entrance into transness, to a severance from his Afro-Puerto Rican culture and family and assimilation into whiteness.

Eddie likens the indignity of being misnamed with that of being misgendered, but at the same time subverts the typical narrative of deadnaming. He pairs stories of being called "she" by coworkers not to being called "Edsuvani" when he should have been called "Eddie," but instead to his childhood experience of his name being "shorten[ed] and butcher[ed]" (XY243). The connective threat, for him, is not the use of particular gendered signifiers, but instead the act of identity-butchered and attendant disrespect: a trans experience not only "about" transness. He credits his mother — who he also describes as having been hostile to his nascent queer-and-transness — as the person who taught him "how to get angry" at being called the wrong thing, and was the person who modeled pride in difference (XY243). In his essay, we see Eddie growing-into and

out-of his names at the same time, learning cultural pride as he learns trans pride; and thus both embracing a name that once shamed him and choosing strategically to use another. “Eddie” is both the Americanized shorthand for his complex history, and an affirmation of his boihood; both a call to a past of patchwork shame for his body and culture and a call to the future.

For Eddie, being asked “when are you going to change your name?” carries a weighty-double meaning, not only implicitly deeming him *fake-trans* if the answer is “never” but also implying the foreignness he was marked with in his youth. A name he has endured mocking for, a name that connects him with his “family history and generations of love culminating inside [him]” is one he to which he is inclined to retain attachment. When transness is deemed always-already white, denial of the ability to be trans while keeping one’s family-given, culturally-significant name becomes a proxy for demanding whiteness as part of proper transition. Though the demand for trans name changes is not in and of itself a racialized one, a shared demand for public palatability connects trans and/or racialized (mis)naming together.

Kenji Tokawa echoes this sentiment in his essay, *Why You Don’t Have to Choose a White Boy Name To Be A Man in this World*, in which he documents misnaming as simultaneously having a gendered and racialized (dehumanizing) component: a cis white woman mishears “Kenji” as “Candy,” and then as “Benji” (“Benji the dog! [...] Can I call you Benji?”) (GO207-208). Tokawa goes on to name several “trans names” that have become stereotypical and whose style has become somewhat compulsory (“Celtic seems to be really hot right now”): “Adam”, “Brandon,” or “Cayden” (GO208; 210). Not only is this the case within trans communities — wherein being “truly-trans” is too-often valued more than the people whose transness is being measured — but it is also the case for day-to-day issues of passing. “Kenji,” he writes, does not “communi-

cate gender to people from...backgrounds of colonial power and dominance” as a “white name” would, does not command the respect a white man’s name might (GO210). In the absence of the ability to pass on sight, Tokawa longs for the insurance a name like “Adam” promises: even for a non-passing trans man, naming oneself Adam, at the very least, raises gender questions that Kenji may not (GO210). Again, race and (trans)gender-based oppressions prove inextricable from each other, with Kenji’s trans manhood racialized as insufficient, assisted by a tradition of feminization for Asian men, while he is also encouraged to deny his Japanese heritage in order to be legible in his transness.¹⁶ He connects his name-struggle with both demands of whiteness and with the dismissal transness by other Asian people, in both cases revealing that questioning and rejection of his name signify internalized hostility.

Rather than documenting his transition as a move from feminine name to white-masculine name, Tokawa begins his narrative by referencing his birth name, whose “-ko” ending he recognizes as “perhaps a lucky trait in a name for a [white, English-speaking] tomboy” (GO209). In truth, Tokawa realizes that, in his difference, he has the ability to “set the tone” for the “trans man of color” narrative, to name his own experience alongside other “Asian genderfuckers” (GO212). His transition is not from white-feminine name to white-masculine name, but 1) from Japanese-feminine to Japanese-masculine name and 2) from a sense of war between his transness and his Japaneseness (and between his half-Japanese heritage and his half-white heritage) to a realization of the power his Asian transness gives him. Naming, as he writes, “shap[es] the idea of who we are,” (GO212). He controls his narrative and metanarrative

¹⁶ For an in-depth look at API transmasculine experiences and encounters with racialized gender, see Mar, Kobi. "Female -to -Male Transgender Spectrum People of Asian and Pacific Islander Descent." Order No. 3417144 Alliant International University, San Francisco Bay, 2010. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web.

by using and describing his use of “Kenji,” modeling an alternative possibility for trans men of color while reaffirming his whole self.

Our Community Names and Beyond

Subversion of naming convention is one element of the process by which some exercise their “queer-of-queerness” — that is, a form of being which destabilizes both straight and queer expectations. “Queer” itself is a gesture at the ambivalent and ambiguous; an identity whose politics take precedence over its specificity. Efforts at queer-queerness hope to reveal and confront the threat of homo- and trans- normativity, and provide a means of expressing long-held feelings that do not quite fit even into our queerest prescribed frameworks. This subversion is has many names, only one of which is “transbutch.” Queer and trans scholars of color in particular have laid the groundwork for understanding the unspeakable, the twice-unique, through an imperfect medium.

In *Black on Both Sides*, C. Riley Snorton uses Stryker, Currah, and Moore’s language of “double-transness”¹⁷ to refer to Black trans experiences: experiences that are also, under an Afro-pessimist framework, definitionally *non*-experiences. Double-transness becomes a reference both to gender-crossing and gender-impossibility; Black trans non/existence both beyond and in the shadow of the white trans subject¹⁸. This allows it both to address “visible” connections between Blackness and transness, and to allude to all that which it necessarily cannot illuminate: all the unrecorded, unremembered, illegible and unnameable aspects that it can only gesture at by naming itself, what Taylor Johnson called their “impossible bones” (XY216)¹⁹. Double-transness is also not isolable into individual subjects, is not understandable without an-other: it asks, doubly-

¹⁷ Which, employed broadly, refers to trans- experience beyond gender; the ways in which gender-crossing always-already occurs in concert with other modes of embodiment and relation.

¹⁸ Snorton, 10-11.

¹⁹ Snorton, 11.

trans, compared to what? Compared to the white trans prototype? Compared to other forms of homo- and trans- normativity to which we are expected to assimilate for a modicum of medical, legal, and social recognition? Thus the bodies marked double-trans are defined not by particular traits, but in that those traits are always-already in excess of the trans-normative, especially when of color.²⁰

For racialized subjects, double-transness and double-crossing appear as marks on and of the body. Black trans(/)butches, including butches who are cis women²¹, remain double-crossers of normative embodiment: pathologized both for their ostensible-danger as Black subjects, and/ alongside deviating from prescribed gender norms. Thus, Black trans person is doubly-trans because white supremacy places Blackness outside of normative cis gender. As with the co-constitutive gendered and racial oppression Kimberle Crenshaw described as intersectionality²², the person marked both by race and transness faces the threats isolation, violence and death. *Outside the XY* narrator Taylor Johnson experiences gendered racial harassment by the TSA as agents carefully pat down their dreadlocks and their bound chest, grow anxious as Taylor “fall[s] out of gender,” misinterpellated by cis white authorities (213). When they fall back into gender, they fall not into *manhood* but into *Black* manhood, gendered by the “nine guns pointed at [their] body.” The language of double-trans points to a gender too deadly to be possible, yet somehow persistent. Similarly, Black cis butches face these dangerous perceptions, becoming supposed

²⁰ Smalls, Shante P, and Elliot H Powell. “Introduction: Introduction An ImPossibility: Black Queer and Trans* Aesthetics.” *The Black Scholar*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1–5., doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2019.1548054>.

²¹ See the experiences — especially in terms of bathroom harassment — described in Logan, Lauren N. “Minority Stress and Coping Strategies of African American Masculine Identified Lesbians .” *California School of Professional Psychology: San Francisco Campus*, 2010, pp. 1–9.

²² Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, July 1991, p. 1241-1300.

"threats" to [cis] [white] women in public restrooms and thus a target for violent ejection from "safe [women's] space".

To draw attention to a genre of queerness in excess of queer expectation, E. Patrick Johnson uses the word "quare," to describe Black gender/sexual nonconformity. Meant to "throw shade on [*queer*'s] meanings from a Black critical perspective, 'quare' disrupts straight-home and queer-home, acknowledging the "impossibility of representing blackness while simultaneously critiquing its adequacy as a signifier of a people and their [often-queer] cultural productions."²³

²⁴ "Quare" both acknowledges and refuses queerness, exposing the insufficiencies of white queer language to describe other communities. Highlighting the importance of language outside white, homo-/trans-normative logics, "quare" speaks to the "butches, studs, jaspers, and dykes of color" whose presence twists hegemonic language (XY115). While not approaching transbutchness specifically from the experience of queer racialization, my conception of transbutch as a form of queer excess, as a queerness departing the legible, is indebted to the language of "quare" and "double-trans." Further, my understanding of gender-liminality and refusal (and the very technologies of nonbinary gender-departure) are, as I have discussed, rooted in analyses of sexgender as a vehicle, cause, e/affect, and component of white supremacy. White queer and trans understandings of liberation as/through chosen deviation and strategic reclamation of language are indebted to the work of Black and other activists of color.

²³ Holland, Sharon P. "Foreword." *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, edited by E Patrick Johnson and Mae G Henderson, Duke University Press, 2005.

²⁴ Johnson, E Patrick. "'Quare Studies' or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned From My Grandmother" *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, edited by E Patrick Johnson and Mae G Henderson, Duke University Press, 2005.

Infinite modes of queer-queerness exist, and I can and will not attempt to discuss them all. Instead, I will use S. Bear Bergman's story to discuss one particular genre applicable for transbitches — "faggy"²⁵ butchness, whose slanted citation of butchness resembles "quare"'s ambivalent call to "queer". These alternate ways of doing non-normativity shamelessly address the intersection of multiple identities as an inherently political situation, refusing the simple logics of pathology in favor of purposeful ambiguity. As Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel describe in *PoMoSexuals* (itself a queer-of-queer term) this allows us to

[Live] in the space in which all other non-binary forms of sexuality and gender identity reside — a boundary-free zone in which some fences are crossed for the fun of it, or simply because some of us can't be fenced in. It challenges either/or categorizations in favor of largely unmapped possibility and the intense change that comes with transgression...[acknowledging] the pleasure of that transgression, as well as the need to transgress limits that do not make room for all of us (PM23).

²⁵ A word I will use sparingly in this text, replacing it when I can with "effeminate."

Effeminate Butchness

When I take out my purse, I am told there is no name for me. I believed that for a long time — realizing I was butch and settling into it pre-surgery, draping my body in layers to hide my breasts — but post-op, things changed dramatically. I realized that my masculine inclinations had, in many cases, been dependent on the perceived-femininity of my body. Once that femininity had gone, I realized that I had the power to *choose* it again, and this time, to do it my way. I stopped trying to hide my love of shopping and Hello Kitty, browsing feminine clothes, and playing dress-up games. I stopped fretting over “dressing the [butch] part” because my flat chest became a permanent accessory, doing crucial identificatory legwork no matter what I wore.

Now that I’m post-surgery, there are plenty of feminine I’ve decided I’m allowed to be seen in. I have a pink shirt with rainbow dinosaurs on it. It’s from the little girls’ section. Fun, loud patterns are a mainstay of my wardrobe; now I can wear bright colors, talk with my hands, and not worry that by doing so I am drawing attention to the pair of breasts that threaten to ruin me. As I write this, I am wearing the oversized flannel I bought from the thrift store in my first year of college, the one I wore to my top surgery consultation. Underneath it, I wear a t-shirt I bought years ago from someone whose name has since changed, who has become a he, and who has fallen in love with men, himself included. I am wearing a pair of dangling earrings — home-made, in the shape of curled-up foxes — in my ears.

It isn’t that things are simple now. Just as surgery didn’t “cure” my transness, it certainly didn’t cure peoples’ perceptions of my sliding place on the masculine-feminine spectrum. (I was misgendered by a barista when I stopped for coffee only the day after my mastectomy.) Still, my embodied crossing has queered and butched my effeminacy. I’m butch because I was trans first,

and now I am effeminate because I was already butch: my process of self-making has brought me through several successive filters of non-conformity. More than anything else, I'm queer to everyone, especially others who fit more smoothly into queerness.

My presentation has invited personal and externally-instigated doubts as to my butch legitimacy. It's difficult to take part in this butch citational chain, this "historical construct": calling oneself butch is placing oneself in a series of others, past, present, and future (BAAN65). Being attached to such a long cultural and aesthetic lineage based in a chosen affinity-group is intimidating: we produce our claims of legitimacy and belonging by replicating not the "truth" of what the past generation did before us, but a shoddily-translated image of it that must somehow remain recognizable. If those whose shoes I walk in do not recognize me, my attachment to them is threatened. In a continuous effort to be seen and included, narrative clichés such as those I've discussed in this thesis have been prioritized, whereas non-normative, inconvenient expressions — including transbutch effeminacy — have been written out of possibility. If these logics prevail, those who do effeminate transbutchness are struck by a hermeneutically unjust situation, wherein rather than being effeminate, they simply do butchness "wrong."

When I first realized there was such a thing as effeminate butchness, it was my own joyful coming-to-terms. I will never forget the moment that I read Miriam Zola Pérez's essay, *Coming Back Around to Butch*, realizing that the stories of tomboyism, roughness, broad shoulders and mens' clothes, unsmiling expressions and work boots, was not all that butchness could offer me. Pérez rejects comfortable transbutch narratives as incomplete and inadequate for her. She writes early on: "I was never a tomboy," only to continue, "There, I said it. I was never a god-

damn tomboy” (P). Having “flaunted [her] cleavage” and worn skirts well into her twenties, Pérez — though then-unfamiliar with many aspects of queer culture — knew enough to feel “self-conscious about claiming butchness” (P). As she immerses herself in the narrative of butch-emergence, she feels increasingly alienated and even ashamed:

The butch narrative I had absorbed, the one I began to furtively read about as I came out, wasn't mine. *I wasn't a rough-and-tumble butch kid, all scabby knees and hardness, fighting against mom over Sunday dresses. I wasn't good at sports, didn't have trouble being friends with girls, didn't feel more "boy" than "girl."* So when I slowly started easing toward the masculine side of the spectrum, I was self-conscious as hell. I felt like an impostor. I felt like a phony (P).

Though butchness neither warrants medical diagnosis nor claims to require medical intervention, butches tell familiar justificatory childhood stories in order to prove their legitimacy. Even Bergman, later an effeminate butch, writes on behalf of all transbutches that there are *always* fights about clothes, refusals of “the dress of the day,” homogenizing childhood approaches to self-presentation (BAAN79). These are the narrative expectation Pérez finds impossible.

As an adult, Pérez increasingly uses drag to explore her gender, playing with the limits of butchness both sexually and socially. She hesitates identifying as butch, not confident she “counts,” until she meets an effeminate butch and realizes that butchness is *dynamic*, not “set in stone.” Her new “gender friend,” S, brings effeminacy into her field of vision. S writes to Pérez that they “need more faggy butches in [their] life!” and this becomes a term Pérez clings to (P). Butchness turned from an ill-fitting box into a conversation, a friendship, and an ongoing process. This view lets butchness play, despite its stereotypical predication on “severity” that is

most clearly expressed within the butch/femme dynamic.²⁶ As we will see with Bergman, it also opens up new sexual possibilities, questioning the “whole code, unwritten but no less rigid than if it were chilled in stone, about how Tops Must Be,²⁷ how Butches Must Be... [that] certainly does not include taking a break [from masculinity] once in a while to inhabit some other gender, role, or sensibility” (BAAN201). Butches like Bergman and Pérez reflect their own kind of “butch 2.0” (albeit one that, ironically, MB would likely discredit for its effeminacy), a round refusal of the butch as “dead” or “trapped” in the role.

After reading Pérez’s essay, I found that “faggy” butches and other dykes were everywhere, and that this form of counter-queerness had historical precedent. In *PoMoSexuals*, narrator Jill Nagle describes packing the front of her black lace g-string at gay parties in the aptly-titled essay “Stroking My Inner Fag” (PM122). Nagle’s story draws attention to the disproportionate number dykes who engage in queer manhood (as opposed to the “reverse” situation) largely the result of the insularity of sex-negative, purity-obsessed cultural feminism, which barred queer women from developing an “outrageous, public sexual culture” (PM85). This is part of a larger reactionary politic that rejects and dehumanizes sex workers and expresses revulsion against SM, casual sex, and other practices associated with queer men (PM87; 109). This contingent, which Carol Queen refers to as “the Michigan Womyn’s Festival-going set,” (r)ect the so-called male energy (that is, “cooties”) surrounding these practices (PM80-81). Thus, an effeminate butch may become so in order to have a different genre of queer sex; one not permitted by lesbian mandate. Queen comments precisely on this in describing her own relationship with gay men and

²⁶ Kennedy and Davis, 989

²⁷ Operating under the assumption that all butches must be sexually aggressive toward their partners, femmes, who must be sexually passive — not even getting into the imprecision and loadedness of words like “aggressive” and “passive.”

effeminacy. She notes not only gay aesthetic aspirations but also gay sexual desires. A long-time dyke, she felt constant pressure to modulate and hide her love of and sex with gay men; knowing the latter to indeed be “queer sex” but also knowing it was not legible as such. She loved men in a way a straight woman could not, and that they shared a queer relationality that transcended assigned sexgender, which Dorothy Allison reinforces by distinguishing “queer” relationships between two women from their “lesbian” counterparts (PM109-111). Again, “queer” and “lesbian” move beyond individual statements of true-identity, instead becoming political approaches to what looks on the surface like the same relationship.

With these political aims at the fore, the dyke and fag are not opposites, but accompli, different approaches to similar relational goals. This is important to keep in mind as we consider Bergman’s “transition” — perhaps better termed a rearticulation of the same core politics for a different genre of body and relationship. Looking through the lens of a shared politics of defiance and ambiguity, we might look at butch-to-gay transitions as more than crossings to an opposite side, defections to a new world. Instead, they may serve to highlight long-held values and traits, an unflinching set of radical politics, which simply require a change in presentation.

Bergman

Bergman Against Boxes

S. Bear Bergman began his ongoing activist career as a genderqueer butch, making his name as a self-proclaimed “gender-jammer” and advocating for gender-neutral pronouns, specifically ze/hir. In 2006, he wrote *Butch is a Noun*, devoting considerable space to his situatedness in the butch/femme dynamic — despite not claiming lesbianism and being unsure in his “butch” identity. Bergman’s butchness was “kept on credit,” a dykehood that never quite entered “lesbian” territory (BAAN69). Yet, lesbians claimed him and even attempted to *possess* him (as with Coyote), smothering him in appreciation for not “defecting” to the other side. Bergman also replicated these border-war anxieties, critiquing yet also worrying over his place amidst them. He ultimately chooses an approach to gender that neither reifies medical transness nor validates TERF rhetoric, instead claiming butchness, queerness, and multiple forms of transness as elements of his experience, his gender a kind of capsule project to be updated over time. Rather than identifying himself as trans(or)butch, Bergman solidifies his identity as, first and foremost, politically queer: an advocate of radical visibility and crossing. Later, he moves toward trans manhood, forcing readers (including myself) to reconsider what radical queerness means as it transcends gender.

Bergman first takes great pleasure in recounting butch/femme stories, highlighting the dynamic’s subversive potential. He visibilizes himself as a transbutch in balancing a chivalrous protection for and queer admiration of femmes (BAAN36-37). Visibility weighs heavily on his mind as a butch pleasure and obligation: “in its most common, most delicious, female masculini-

ty incarnation, butch looks queer...*in the old way*: queer as in different, peculiar to the normative eye” (BAAN65) [emphasis mine]. In a butch’s gender-play with femmes, they embody “masculinity reflected in a wavy mirror,” in implied contrast to the trans man, whose masculinity is not wavy, but “straight”. (PM12). Even in a strictly rule-based role system, the visibly-queer b/f dynamic “do[es] not meet social expectations,” with rules not functioning in “the context of the normal, but of the forbidden (PM12). While the trans man, in this formulation, does masculinity uncritically, the butch “has [its] way with“ gender alongside femmes and other gender-crossers, trans-forming existence into a form of activism (BAAN58). This butch approach facilitated interpersonal activism important to Bergman as a storyteller and educator, able to form what *Gender Outlaws* narrator CT Whitley calls “a bridge [...] between gendered communication styles” (GO37). Bergman, while not a man, used his self-proclaimed “coyote gender” to connect with young men “on the precipice of sex” (BAAN114). His genderqueer butchness allowed a multimodal and highly-connected existence, facilitating his interpersonally-rooted activism.

This, along with TERF efforts at butch reincorporation, cause Bergman great anxiety as he contemplates gender-crossing. Though not a lesbian, he receives the label; lesbians believe embodied similarities, including breasts, constitute a shared identity (BAAN49). As TERFs fight to reincorporate butches as radically-visible figures instead of gender traitors, Bergman is congratulated for “staying a lesbian,” asked how he “dared call [him]self a butch” and criticized for being “too masculine” (BAAN117; 221) (NE69-72). Simultaneously too effeminate and too “male-identified,” he becomes placeless in the very butch space he has carved for himself, “several bubbles off gender and tilting fast” (BAAN57; 67). At the same time, Bergman increasingly passes as a “Nice Young Man” and considers “tak[ing] hormones and hav[ing]

surgeries” (BAAN5). He enjoys the privileges, especially size-related, that this affords him: ”when Sir orders a Coke, he gets one,” but “when Ma’am orders a Coke, half the time a diet Coke arrives” (BAAN5; 56). Passing as a man in a fatphobic, misogynistic world means he can be a “big guy” and not “indecently fat” (BAAN56). Initially he continues to prioritize queer visibility, “want[ing] the outlaw [he is] to get a public hearing, a public viewing, and to have a chance to speak for himself” that seemed to foreclose trans manhood (BAAN57). He takes comfort in his ability to “stick with” non-normative masculinity, overemphasizing in words what he struggles to contend with in the material world.

Despite being a writer himself, Bergman fears the accusatory and demanding “pins of language” demanding he “explain [him]self” (BAAN32). He most brutally articulates the threats of language in “Sticks and Stones Will Break My Bones, But Words Will Kill Me,” wherein a reiteration of the homophobic and transphobic language he has been attacked with are presented without comment, his own silence a kind of narrative death (BAAN116-118). He uses Brandon Teena in particular to illustrate both murder as a result of classification, and of classification as itself an act of violence, writing that Brandon was “wrestled down out of the sky and pinned down by flesh or steel in order to be identified and shoved into the last box [he’ll] ever occupy” (BAAN33). The rise of “border wars”-based arguments over Brandon’s identification, which to some degree displaced genuine rage and grief at his murder, is evidence of a cultural “love affair with boxes” Bergman sees taking precedence over the humanity of queer subjects (BAAN33). Rather than accepting the terminological pins shoved toward himself from all sides, Bergman gravitates toward the term “transgender,” an interpretive, “wide-open” space of becoming that does not force him into manhood (BAAN64). He uses his trans identification to encour-

age erstwhile border-warriors to “quit spending so much time fighting amongst [them]selves” over mutable, subjective identities, instead highlighting what a privilege it is to fight over identity and not for survival (BAAN70).²⁸ With the invocation of trans killings both material and metaphoric, Bergman argues convincingly that borders, even those made of words, are inherently violent, in that they annihilate trans possibility, trapping people in a stasis antithetical to a trans(butch) politic.

²⁸ A point whose binary presentation I disagree with, but which is crucial to understand amid battles over the “real identities” transbutch subjects like Brandon Teena.

Satirizing Dysphoria

Just as he refuses taxonomization, Bergman evades the language of “dysphoria” in his work and for his own experience. Instead, he advocates for a desire and even aesthetically-based transness rather than one rooted in pathology. In accordance with his trans-relational politic, Bergman sees his body as a communicative device and even a plaything, not as inherently broken or sick. Through a humorous, yet earnest approach to bodily dissatisfaction, Bergman performs and argues for embodied transition as a form of gender-play and gender-learning, mocking the wrong-body rhetorics that deny him agency — and fun. At the same time, however, when he addresses sites of immense pain and cultural significance — particularly breasts — he does so sincerely, making it clear that his mockery is reserved for the medical establishment and not for himself or his fellow transbitches.

His departure from standard dysphoria narratives is most apparent in his avoidance of the doctor’s office setting. He avoids medical nosology altogether, instead satirizing “born in the wrong body” narratives in an essay titled “When Will You Be Having the Surgery?” Here, Bergman turns the trans desire from pathology to aesthetic fantasy, first invoking the language of typical trans stories and later subverting it. He begins by writing, “it’s true, I am trapped in the wrong body. And the truth is that if I could have surgery to fix it, I would in a hot second” (NE51). Then, he constructs several ideal bodies he would have preferred to be born into. Bergman is willing to be a “slim, slight gentleman dandy of the 1920s,” or a “zaftig redhead girl, all tits and freckles.” He imagines his possible ideal-body as having wings or a tail — a trans-formation he seeks is not one medicine is able to provide (NE53-54). He quickly turns his imagined bodies into characters, elaborating on his imagined zaftig redhead: “the surgery would

also have to give me her purring smoke-and-honey alto, her confidence with people of all genders, her steady hand [...] [She] could linger over coffee or a short glass of good scotch all by herself and watch the world go by” (NE52). Here, Bergman takes the narrative of wrong-embodiment and queers it, interested not in turning-normal but using magic or medical technology to become whichever character suits his wishes. Knowing that there is no degree of “realness” a trans person can truly satisfy under the cis gaze, no right-body that will remove the mark of crossing, Bergman is free to make his own impossible proposals.

Going a step further than satire, Bergman fleshes out his impossible ideal bodies both as an earnest, creative act and as a way of explaining his own choice not to undergo surgery. As he floats transition ideas, he notes his hesitance to commit to more normalized forms of biomedical intervention for fear that they will be unsatisfying in comparison to his fantasies, the only images of himself he is positive he will enjoy forever. He writes that he will not get surgery unless sure that “[the new] body would feel very right...like having wings would be or even right like wearing spats²⁹ would be” (NE54). Bergman’s right-body, if winged, is impossible given contemporary medical technologies, yet it is the only body he is confident he will want forever. With ideal images of different genders in his head (but “more boys than girls”), Bergman is unconvinced that surgery on individual parts of his body will make him happier than he already is (NE52). Even if it did, he is unsure if the person he will become will feel the same way. Thus, he avoids the finality of surgeries, aware that the doctor-made “right body” is largely permanent (and in the case of phalloplasty, often inaccessible³⁰ even to those who want it) and if not permanent, the

²⁹ Evidently a form of antique shoe cover, worn to protect the shoe from “spat(tered)” mud, water, and worse, a daily hazard of sharing the streets with horses.

³⁰ Arnold, Justin D., et al. “Transgender Surgery—Not the Benchmark for Gender Marker Determination.” *JAMA Surgery*, vol. 152, no. 12, Dec. 2017, doi:10.1001/jamasurg.2017.3432.

subject of anti-trans “detransition” discourse. He sets stories of wrong-embodiment and pathological dysphoria aside in order to attend to fantasy, with wings and tails representing the bodies we perpetually strive toward.

Bergman’s essays cast doubt on medicalized dysphoria, instead revealing the “right body” as a dynamic and subjective experience. Acknowledging the seriousness of body-discomfort, he suggests an approach to “dysphoria” that respects individuals’ gendered needs without turning those needs into a sickness. That is, he again uses the common language of transbutchness to prioritize a community-based approach to what he identifies not as an individual, but a cultural problem. He notes, for example, that overarching diagnostic approach severely limits the types of relationships transbutches are expected to have with our breasts/chests, each of which is unique. “There is nothing I can say about breasts from A Butch Standpoint [...] that I feel confident is going to be almost always true,” he writes; to do so would be to invoke an essentialism he refuses (BAAN47). Not all butches loathe their breasts, he argues, and just as there are butches for whom breasts hold the “possibilities of great pleasure,” there are “those who like feelings, and those who like sundresses” (BAAN47-49; 52). Bergman’s refusal of “dysphoria” also becomes a refusal of social stereotype, the ability to imagine butches in dresses — a thought to some as impossible as a human with wings. Looking into the complex, ongoing history of binding, Bergman describes a variety of reasons one might flatten their chest. Before the invention of the spirts bra, some butches bound simply because no chest-minimizing bras existed; others did so to mitigate what would later be marked as “dysphoria” (BAAN51).

I myself encounter some people who bind for the sleek look of a flat chest beneath a dress shirt; others who bind to queer their relationships to the dresses and makeup they wear.

Some who bind, even for years, wouldn't dream of pursuing a mastectomy; others, myself included, fumble desperately until we attain it. I read some narratives of transbutch embodiment – Bergman's included — and remain surprised at how alienated I feel. Yet the limits of what transbutch can be are merely the limits of the collective imagination. As Bergman calls us to fantastically-rethink "wrong-embodiment" and question medicine's capacity to cure the pain its own sexgender binary caused, he reminds us that our right-bodies, or the right-bodies available to us, are diverse. Stepping beyond medical narratives of dysphoria, we might approach transbutch bodies with humor and good faith. Imagination will save us where medicine, inevitably, fails.

*

It seemed I had a body I could not love, imagine, or dream my way out of. My own relationship to my body and to "dysphoria" has been an ongoing tension as I have written this thesis: how to explain the unceasing, deep-seated agony I felt prior to my surgeries while thinking outside the language of the medical system I was compelled to engage with? It seemed and seems I cannot. The tension remains, likely never to be resolved.

I don't know where my own need for medical intervention came from, nor why I have lived an experience that contradicts Bergman's. I don't know why he, a man, did not feel the severity of feeling I, a nothing, felt before my surgeries. I narrate his story with enthusiasm because it feels ideal: "dysphoria" is a thing to be accommodated socially, something that has the potential to fade in the face of absolute trans acceptance. Already, I know people who cite decreasing body-hatred as they enter trans-affirming spaces; stories of hated chests that become manageable once untied from constant misgendering. I see people not "detransitioning" in the

political sense, but simply no longer putting long hours into creating what they believed to be a trans-enough image, once they realize they are being seen.

But I also know myself, I know how small my pre-surgery chest was, how easy it would have been to hide. A loose t-shirt and sports bra without padding produced comparable results to a binder, and this was essential given that sensory issues prevented me from wearing a standard binder. Either way, I could pass (as what?) fairly easily if I tried. Between that and my narrow hips, my reaction to my body feels almost disproportionate (to whose?).

It was clear that my hatred extended beyond the ways in which others interpreted me. I asked harder questions of my body than anyone else ever could. When I came to college and was finally surrounded by those who didn't ruthlessly gender my chest, things did not get better. Every day felt as if it were whittling my edges, and without action, I would eventually be nothing at all.

It was even worse when I was alone, when it was nighttime or when I was in the shower, and I had to sit there with/in myself. I'm not above or outside the myriad cultural influences on my gaze, but I also can't pretend I have ever felt worse than when I am alone with only my body for company. I felt feelings that have many names, one of which is dysphoria. While I am by no means immune to the influences of culture and society on our perceptions of sexgendered bodies, I am convinced there is something more to the feeling I get alone, just myself and the mirror. It's all the things I can't say in this thesis, all the things that feel contradictory and confounding.

These are unresolvable tensions that we must hold.

Bergman's Butch2Gay Transition

After a long stint as a butch whose butchness was ever-in-question, Bergman begins to carve himself a space in “faggy” (henceforth “effeminate”) butchness. With a tenuous grasp on butchness primarily located in his relationship to his femme wife, Bergman recognizes the importance of the butch/femme lineage of which he is a part, and uses a non-conformist butchness (which meets neither butch ideals nor femme expectations) as a lens for his queer masculinity (BAAN65). Though he identifies with tomboy childhood tropes including refusal of feminine clothing and the internal sense that he was never a “real girl,” Bergman remains at the butch fringes (BAAN149-152). Catalyzed by a new, gay relationship, Bergman ultimately adds trans manhood onto his life experience of butchness, dykehood, and genderqueerness. His transition is a process of realizing, pursuing, and accepting a new genre of queer masculinity, including his gay desire. He crosses not from the “wrong” body to the right one, but into a new and more satisfying genre of queerness.

Bergman's anxieties around butchness are largely located in expectations around the butch/femme dynamic. In the satirical opening passage of *BAAN*, Bergman references two interlocking beliefs: that all butches must exclusively desire femmes, and that all butches must be sexually dominant (presumably toward femmes). This is emblematic of a larger demand that butches and femmes be defined solely in relation to and opposition with one another, that “there has to be [a femme] in order to be a true butch” (BAAN17). Bergman learned these traditional views of b/f online, when he was otherwise isolated from other queer people. In “Virtual Butch Reality,” he describes femmes digitally “schooling [him]...that [his] attraction to them as femmes *made [him] a butch* and not in any way a het girl *or* a het guy” [emphasis mine]

(BAAN85). He is butch *because* he desires femmes, a desire which, if called into question, would call into question his butch identity. Relationality is necessary and essential to b/f, meaning that the butch4butch relationships Bergman enjoyed were silenced and stigmatized (BAAN86). Though he learns that butch icons like Leslie Feinberg were not invariably dominant and untouchable, Bergman was aware of the stigma surrounding, as he titled the relevant essay, “Getting Fucked” (BAAN187-188). While concluding the pleasure he feels with other butches outweighs the stigma, Bergman is hesitant to speak publicly about his genre of sexuality, at first wanting to keep hold of butch identity.

Fearing expulsion from “dyke space,” Bergman at first conceals and displaces his butch4butch desire, writing about his love for femmes and b/f roleplay. At the same time, he writes of his ambivalence primarily through others’ words. In a BAAN section called “Faggot Butch,” he quotes a fellow butch who calls him out for ignoring butch4butch and universalizing b/f. He tells Bergman, “I know you’re not just for femmes,” instead reminding him “[not to] forget to mention [to readers] that you put butches on their knees in front of you...that you kneel down too...that you understand how wonderful it can be to feel butch arms around you” (BAAN149; 151-152). Through the words of another butch, Bergman explicitly states his sexual desires, taboo within b/f community and treated with disgust by the heterosexual world, and one whose insecurities are the result, as one blogger notes, of internalized homophobia and misogyny (BAAN 150).³¹ This other butch also calls Bergman out for taking the “easy” route, moving through a well-defined, relatively popular b/f subculture. He instructs Bergman not to “chicken out” of writing about his relationships with other butches, not simply as platonic

³¹ “Coming Out to Myself as a Butch Fag.” Butch on Butch, 7 Nov. 2011, butchonbutch.wordpress.com/2011/11/07/coming-out-to-myself-as-a-butch-fag/.

“brothers,” (a safe phrase Bergman uses liberally throughout the work) but as lovers (BAAN151).

Between the first publication of *BAAN*, the second publication, and the later publication of *TNE*, Bergman’s life undergoes radical changes mostly grounded in his shifting identities — most dramatically, from genderqueer butch with an increasingly-dissatisfied femme wife to trans man with a new husband (TNE158). He represents these crossings with comparisons to transitions of aesthetics and location, turning from a “suburban dyke” to a “city fag” after marrying gay activist j wallace (TNE19). He compares his outward changes to coming home from camp as a child to his newly-renovated home: “mostly the same [...] but the paint, wallpaper, and carpet had all changed” (TNE19). As an adult, he has “*moved out of* jeans and t-shirts and into capris and a summer fedora...[and] let [his] little goatee grow in, started wearing earrings again,” and even repainted his study, changing his body and his living space [emphasis mine](TNE19). Like the renovated house, Bergman assures us, the underpinnings of his Self have stayed the same: he carries with him the same lived experiences of non-girlhood and the same memories of butchness. His extended comparison to renovation allows Bergman to reaffirm a direct connection to his tomboy past “play[ing] in a decidedly unladylike fashion,” running shirtless and committing what he called “gender crimes” until stymied by puberty (BAAN79; 103). This tomboyhood trans-formed into a radically-different present from Spoon’s or Coyote’s, but it remains inherently connected to the effeminate man Bergman has become — while ever-changing, his body is the same home underneath.

Also constant is Bergman's queer approach to life, which outstrips particular gender or orientation labels in importance. Because of this commitment to queer living, Bergman's butch non-manhood becomes untenable when he falls in love with a man. Much like other queers who plan their post-transition sexualities, Bergman transforms from a dyke to a fag in order to remain in the "gestalt of queerness" (PM123). This type of movement destabilizes the assumption that movement from butchness to manhood is a move from queerness to straightness; rather Bergman's transition is to different queer registers for different partners. Gender, again, is radically relational, something guided by who we are among rather than by discourses of sickness and cure. What remains true of Bergman, what he may argue is at his core, is merely the desire to transgress, fueled by an understanding that no binary will contain him. Where outside that binary he will land as a question with no solid answer, as ever-changing language allows him to "[walk] through a door into a whole different kind of possibility" every day (TNE21).

INCONCLUSION

Transbutchness and Experience

To be transbutch is to flee, exceed, evade, and refuse sexgender-prescriptivism: regardless of nominal transness or cisness, transbutchness requires an understanding that no sexgender is guaranteed. While posing exciting counter-gender lines of flight, transbutch ambiguity also poses barriers to collective solidarity. Without recourse to attributes of shared essence (be they genitals, chromosomes, or “dysphoric” pathologies), a critique of self-naming appears an effort at erasure. In the absence of direct recourse to the body, then, a similar essentialism around gendered “socialization” has emerged, which unifies all who were “socialized female” on the basis of shared trauma. This is no history on which to base transbutchness, for it is a history that excludes TMA transbutches and reduces a diversity of experiences to predictable pain. Far from countering biological essentialism, the essentialism of “socialization” uses new language to advance familiar dogma.

However, we must also rely on shared experiences across gender — across borders — in order to understand ourselves not at war but in community. Throughout this thesis, I have outlined the ways in which trans(/)butches reinscribe, exceed, topple, and build borders between genders and sexualities, not in the mere hopes of illustrating a hopelessly complicated field of sexgender conflicts but also as a means of providing a bridge across those conflicts and into a kind of armistice. Identification not as but *with* each other, with common and uncommon elements of each others’ lives, is a way to start. Terms like “socialization,” carry a prescriptive and even punitive quality — solidarity becomes a non-option, a thing to resent (how to have solidari-

ty with those who endured the same "universal" experiences as you but chose to "flee"? Does that mean your *own* self-concept is wrong?). However, the term "experience" as S. Bear Bergman uses it offers a compelling alternative, not simply to conclude this thesis with but to take with us on a path forward. Bergman conceptualizes gender and sexuality as a series of layered experiences in a constantly-moving archive of self whose nominal identity is always subject to change. The past becomes an accessory to the present-future self. In distinguishing himself (a "transman of butch experience") from his husband (a "faggot of faggot experience") Bergman acknowledges the role of history in shaping identity without the determinism of socialization.¹ While Bergman and his husband eroticize their similarity, and both move through the world as men, Bergman grew up in dyke spaces, surrounded and influenced by old-school butches, making his path to manhood unique. Using his remaining butch mannerisms to resist trans behavioral norms, making more space in the fold for those like Coyote and MB, whose butchness remains ongoing.

Using the framework of "experience," we can thus overcome the binary choice of transness or butchness, before or after, man or woman. We can open doors to understanding each other, regardless of seemingly-contradictory histories. For this reason, and to acknowledge my own identificatory trail, I refuse to place an empty space between trans(and)butch — just as Bergman, knowing his manhood is impossible without transness, says "transman." Transbutch is an ongoing historical journey as well as a political practice. It allows us continuity with our young-selves and future-selves. It pays homage to our respective, unique experiences growing up without claiming a false-universal socialization. Most importantly, it gives us the narrative

¹ Bergman, 2012.

agency. This framework leaves something to be desired, evidenced by the use of tropes and clichés in the memoirs I read. However, the transbutch philosophy calls for us to enter spaces without checking the rest of their lives at the door, and opens a pathway toward explicitly addressing and dismantling normalizing narratives. These identities and practices are things to move through, rather than settle for.

Lastly, affinity based in a multiplicity of varied, sometimes-shared experiences allows us to organize neither for nor against perceived borders, but outside of them. Transbutch is a shared politic, a politic toward the abolition of borders which ultimately serve to alienate and isolate our communities. As we stitch our experiential tapestry together, I hope we can admire our respective, unique stories of trans-gression, in a way similar to (and hopefully better than) what I have done with my own narrators. When we enter the subjective realm, leave definite truths behind, we gain the courage and compassion to see each other whole.

Terminological Disobedience

Like pillows, I believe words could do with a bit of periodic fluffing; at the very least, an occasional flip to the cold side. Transbutchness is a framework for terminological disobedience, a way to strategically resist simplistic trans/butch/lesbian narratives and “queerly normative” genders. Now that we understand “experience” — the architectural substance of our narrative-identities — we can discuss the strategic adoption and refusal of identity and community by those typically deemed “not quite right.” What is the power in invoking and resignifying the language once meant to cage us; in wielding a gratuitous transness, or cis-excess, not only outside of but against medical dogma?

Every new person who claims trans, claims butch, claims both, produces a new and exciting example of what these words might mean. I frequently ask myself why I still claim the word lesbian, why I employ “transbutch” when there exist a subsection of TERFs today who attempt to “reclaim” the term from TMA transbutches who rightfully use it, or claim that trans men who erroneously claim a once-held butchness are more legitimate than transbutches assigned male at birth². Why, even, I grudgingly use the language of “dysphoria” to discuss dis-jointment, dis-appointment, dis-trust, dis-pair. As for the latter, the answer is lack of options, and I have been increasingly using “body-hate” and “body-anguish” instead. As for the former, I use the term “lesbian” for several more complex reasons. Unlike “dysphoria,” born and reified via the medical industry, “lesbian” holds genuine extra-medical possibilities, and cites a long history of sexgender resistance, including that which I’ve detailed throughout this thesis.

² Strongorcbutch, Eve. *Whenever I Occasionally Post Things along the Lines...* 29 Sept. 2018, strongorcbutch.tumblr.com/post/189721207652

So, why “lesbian”? I identify with the word. I identify it alongside the heartbreak I felt as a child, terrified at the looming prospect of marriage to a man (which I believed to be an inevitability) and at the thought that I, unable to love any boy, was somehow incapable of *all* love. I refused the label for years, believing I was “too trans” to count, and that surely, somewhere, there *must* be a boy I might be capable of dealing with. When I finally became a lesbian, it was my choice: I actively choose not to date men. I choose to recognize and revel in the fact that I don’t have to. I don’t equivocate whether or not a theoretical man might work for me, I simply take the option off the table, exercise my relational autonomy: lesbianism empowers me to make this choice. Since working on this thesis, I have also chosen lesbianism as a way of showing the genres of lesbianism that are possible: that someone can enter lesbianism *from* years of “trans-masculinity” (a term I fit beneath but personally refuse), that someone can enter butchness with barrettes in their hair and T beneath their skin, that someone’s lesbian identity can not only exist beside but act as an integral part of their refusal of womanhood. This butch lesbianism is queer, it breaks its own walls. It doesn’t flee, it *flies*. This butch lesbianism refuses stasis (it is trans, it crosses), just as it demands our collective ongoing history to do the same. My demands of transness are equally radical, though admittedly more complex given my own position as someone “diagnosed” by the transmedical industry. I use “trans” because I cross and destabilize sex-gender, that I bring myself into being in the constant act of movement. If other butches feel an affinity to this definition, they are welcome to it, regardless of what “dysphoria” means to them.

The invocation of transness in affirming one’s butchness can disrupt anti-trans currents in “lesbian community” and even abolish the mythic “lesbian-exclusive” space: gender-crossing is not an invasive threat to be walled-off, but a constant reality; as long as sexgender mandate

looms large above us all, we will cross in unique and necessary ways. The feelings we call dysphoria are a reaction to sexgender essentialism and a rhetorical vehicle toward survival. With the possibilities of transbutchness fully realized — that is, taken to their gender-abolitionist goals — the language of dysphoria would be abolished out of necessity, and no longer available for weaponization by transmedicalists or TERFs. There would be no “right” body nor “right” gender; gender *in and of itself* would be recognizable as not-right. Indeed, gender poses the very problem that “transbutch” seeks to expose: that no individual identity is possible without the exclusion of alliance and possibility; intrinsic identity is only thinkable at the expense of solidarity, forcing us to obfuscate crucial shared stories.

If we are to understand transness as not rooted in pursuit of medical intervention (that is, one can cross genders without medical authorization, and that no singular or combination of medical interventions “makes” a trans person) but in positive, particularly ideological, identification, then anyone — butch or otherwise — has a clear path to trans-exploration. Though I speak primarily in terms of trans *subjectivity*, identification *with* transness/ transbutchness is more relevant than identification *as* trans. Taken as referring to “affiliation” and not identification, transbutchness can draw connections across culture as well as time and age. Butches, bois, AGs, MoCs, (trans)mascos, dykes, nonbinary people, trans men, butch trans women, and infinite others might join in disobedient alliance with the *transbutch*, itself made out of two pirated identificatory labels. Transbutch lets us name our disidentification with transness and butchness, calling to mind, admitting citation of, and ultimately subverting direct imitation of familiar genre conventions. Trans is a thing that can be done, a perpetual-possibility whose additive power lies in its refusal of definition.

W(h)ither Dysphoria?

A compassionate, informed transbutch politic requires the abolition of “dysphoria” language, and instead a movement toward post-dysphoric solidarity. I mean post-dysphoric not in the sense of having *overcome* (or “recovered” from) some condition called “gender dysphoria,” but instead acknowledging that dysphoria has been done to us. Dysphoria is the name of the story medicine and psychiatry tell of those they deem “deserve [their] trans”, one that gains value the more Others are deprived of it (BAAN69). Dysphoria, as a discursive tool, separates trans and cis bodies: this is both its social and its biomedical function. Dysphoria is done unto us with the utterance of diagnosis, and reified with each of our respective claims to “feel dysphoric.” But what if we acknowledged we could hold the same feelings, the same ineffable body-hatred, the same dissociations, without all simply being “sick”?

The goal here is not to *end* “medical transition” but to increase and democratize access to it — to perhaps unname it as “transition” and call it *choice*. The abolition of the discursive construct of dysphoria allows us to imagine bodies-in-motion, identities-in-crossing, that are not bound by backslashes or hyphens, and do not appear to take precedence over coalition politics. It also leaves space open for the innumerable nonbinary people who refuse or evade transness, those who do not experience what is legible as “gender dysphoria” yet seek a nuanced, complex, often-contradictory understanding of gender, and approach gender with the same politic of trans(/)butches of all kinds. Without the weight of dysphoria on our collective backs, we may move toward not only a transbutch but a *nonbinary* conceptual framework, one that dismantles the cis/trans binary as well as the man/woman binary. When we claim discrete gender experiences and identities predicated on an inborn, pathological dysphoria, we also isolate ourselves

from the possibility of collective gender abolition. This will not happen unless we abolish the isolation that diagnosis confers — the artificial separation of trans and butch — trans and cis — queer and straight — and more. We require a surfeit of transbutch narratives similar to and different from one another, in order to reaffirm that dysphoria is as much a story as the rest of our lives, and that a shared *story* is a far better basis for a movement than a shared diagnosis.

This is not to say that transbutches are all alike, nor that we must all take up both identities simultaneously. Nor is it a call to ignore differences between our individual wants and needs. Some of us will want The Surgery, some of us won't, and some of us won't be able to give a clear answer until they know what The Surgery is, how long they have to decide, and whether or not they get one, five, or a hundred years to waffle. Some of us will begin as men and end up far beyond the bounds of womanhood. Some of us will begin as women and end up nowhere, or somewhere very far off course — yet, no one will fly off course, because we will be guided by a shared, liberatory throughline. But in an affinity group, identity change is not “flight,” it's modification and often enhancement. I never knew I could love women this much back when I believed I had to be one. I never knew I could fight so vociferously for the right for breasted people to go topless without being sexualized, for people with uteri to exercise absolute autonomy over their bodies, until I had gotten rid of the organic baggage stopping me from confronting the issues. It's hard to do good activism (or good writing) when you are in too much pain — “dysphoria” — to engage in lucid critical thought. When you are too deep into your story to see it for what it is. I am not resolved, I am unresolvable, but I feel now that my bodymind is free to write/right this work, and I am grateful for it. I wish my doing so had not been the result of medico-psychiatric author-ization, but today I am my own author.

Taking the Hand That Sees You

My grandfather is afraid of heights, and for good reason. As a young boy, he labored on a farm near his home, at an age, for hours, and under conditions which would today certainly be illegal. One of his tasks was to unload the grain from a tall silo. One day, he nearly fell from his precarious position at the top of the ladder, for a time hanging from only one hand from the edge. Had he not somehow managed to hold on, get his other hand on the ladder, and eventually climb back down, he would have fallen, almost certainly to his death.

As a child, I found it odd and almost funny that this man was afraid of something I faced unblinking. At the mall, he'd hold my pink and purple bags from Limited Too and Claire's while my grandmother and I would look through the clear glass from the third floor to the area below, watching tiny people moving back and forth. He stood back against the opposite wall, waiting for us to finish. I would take his hand, sometimes, and try to pull him toward the railing, whose solid weight I trusted even more back then than I do today. He would scramble backward, and, in my childhood ignorance, I would laugh.

The edge, the boundary, is a scary place, particularly when there is no clear demarcation between the here and the out-there. The rail was made of plexiglass and, while perpetually smudged, still gave mall-goers a quiet sense of peril. All there is between my third-floor body and that first-floor concrete is this pathetic little slice of glorified plastic. I am, in fact, very mortal, and relatively little protects me from entirely eradicating the very self that thinks this sentence. (I am especially attuned to this truth as I revise this conclusion from my desk, self-isolated due to COVID-19).

It is precisely this sense of existential terror — how to think nonbeing when the self is itself a thought? — that kept me up many young nights, crying as I tried to understand the *objective universe*, which would continue on long after I could no longer perceive it. On a far smaller scale, I struggled to understand the ways in which the "objective truths" of my life seemed under attack, especially as I entered adolescence. One psychiatric diagnosis of mine transformed into another, both, somehow, objectively true. This alchemy perplexed me as much as my early non-binary identification did. How far into hardly-understanding Judith Butler had I been, I wondered, before I "became" really trans? Or, was I really this way all along? My opinions changed countless times, but I was always comforted by the specter of *something* being true: that there was some back of the universe just out of my reach. Likewise, I hoped that there was some buried essence — some potion made of sex and pathology — somewhere deep within me, and if I was lucky, I'd live to see it all figured out. That clear railing would turn solid, and even my grandfather wouldn't fear free-fall.

In a world in which cisheterosexuality is "logical" and queer and transness are mere gradations of illogic, I understand our collective gravitation to border-setting. To some degree, I even understand paranoia around lesbian obsolescence: the language of naturality and exclusivity is always in danger of becoming obsolete by calls to plurality, even if those calls manifest as identity-abolition. What I have argued throughout this thesis, however, is not an immediate destruction of identity. Quite the opposite, I pose a refreshed, trans-formed approach to identity, looking to narrative to understand how we build selves by stories. We see throughout Bergman's, Coyote's, MB's, and Spoon's respective stories identity not only as internal sensation but as conversation and even argument, as contingent on community acceptance and acceptance *of* com-

munity. That is, identification within the matrix of transbutchness is not reliant on some sense of prior connection, but rather to our respective abilities to take or refuse the hand outstretched to us, to ignore or see through the plastic before our eyes.

Anzaldúa's story challenges the presumption that a trans narrative must center a trans subject, opening this collection of stories I've created with a challenge. For Bergman, the shaky hand of butches and other dykes was a thing to refuse in order to constitute himself as a trans man; he chose increasingly to associate himself with his "brothers" and his now-husband, joining into his self-identity as he joined others in theirs. For Coyote, the coercive inclusion of their crossing body into the rhetorics of butch flight were a cause of anxiety and even hesitant relief – "too trans" and "not trans enough" became grounds for constant negotiation between gender performance for lesbians and for the medical industry. For Spoon, the challenge was to understand that liberation from womanhood did not have to look like manhood; that binary adherence was not liberation at all, but simply a different cage; a cage that Mario Martino successfully and tellingly made himself a home within. For MB, a butchness in excess of cisness that nevertheless refuses transness, complicating the question of whether yesterday's butches would today be trans: rather, she suggests a trans experience that can be felt through a definitively butch body, and that the butch can perform the act of gender-movement while refusing even the anti-category of trans. Each narrator, in their own way, takes up the project of transbutchness and reveals an astonishing, even humbling diversity in its deployment. Its meaning, like its stories, are ever-changing; reliant on narrators themselves to light the way.

After reading all this, what is transbutchness to me? It's April now, so the term has become an annoying little devil I'd like to set aside for a while. Beyond that, though, "transbutch"

is a signpost. A way to describe my relationship to the terminology I have taken on, and the relationships between those bites of language. A signal that there is no liberation if simply for “trans people” and “butches” as if this distinction did any of us justice, never mind those who firmly occupy both words and more. I could never be a lesbian without being transbutch. I could never be a butch without being trans. I can’t be trans without stretching and challenging the term, despite my indebtedness to its legitimizing function. I cannot be transbutch without all those who came before me, without accepting that we will never know who *would have been* trans today or butch yesterday: all we can do is render it a friendly “or” and not a moral judgement. This transition of ideology — from self-truth-seeking to affinity-seeking, from sharing biological truths to sharing stories — we can move away from essentialist narratives and discover the ways in which we and our stories and each other act in constant conversation with transbutches across spacetime. Then, we might have the courage and compassion to carry on our stories; claim the selves we do not yet know.

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