



TRANSEVERYTHINGISM

TRANSGENDER IDENTITIES IN POSTMEDIA AUDIOVISUAL NARRATIVES

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Doctorate in Arts: Production and Investigation

Faculty of Fine Arts

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Universitat Politècnica de València



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This research is dedicated to:

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Alphonza Watson
Chay Reed
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Antash'a English

Gigi Pierce

Cathalina Christina James

Diamond Stephens

Keisha Wells

Sasha Garden

Dejanay Stanton

Vontashia Bell

Shantee Tucker

London Moore

Nikkie Enriquez

Clara Frazier

Tydie Dansbury

Kelly Stough

Dana Martin

Camila Diaz Cordova

Jesusa Fidel Ventura Reyes

Brayan Sánchez Zárate

Ashanti Carmon

Claire Legato

Muhlaysia Booker

Michelle Tamika Washington

Paris Cameron

Chynal Lindsey

Johana Medina Leon

Chanel Scurlock

Zoe Spears

And all of the other unidentified trans people murdered around the world since
this thesis was started in 2015 (en.wikipedia.org, 2018d)

Abstract

Despite an increasing development of transgender studies within particular fields since the early 1990's, it has only been in the last decade or so that an explosive growth of transgender visibility has been experienced in popular culture in the West. The rapidity of progress, compared to previous social movements, is due in large part to the ubiquity of online and digital communication technologies. Access to such media has also provided production and publishing opportunities for artists, especially those identifying with marginalized, ostracized or previously overlooked demographics like the transgender community.

Given the situational relationship between these technologies and trans artists, this research raises the question of how and what a trans artist such as the author of this research utilizes, produces or publishes as part of a multimedia creative practice, and posits that there are shared characteristics that exist between many transgender and postmedia experiences.

In order to answer these research questions, this text deploys and blends both subjective and critical voices within a connective exegetical model. The new knowledge represented by the work and processes of the creative practice are analysed through the further development and application of extant concepts of transgender phenomenology. And, ultimately, the very undertaking of this text itself is presented as an autoethnographic action and a political statement of lived experience.

Resumen

A pesar del creciente desarrollo de estudios sobre personas transgénero en campos particulares desde principios de la década de 1990, solo en la última década se ha experimentado un crecimiento explosivo de la visibilidad de personas transgénero en la cultura popular de Occidente. La rapidez del progreso, en comparación con los movimientos sociales anteriores, se debe en gran parte a la ubicuidad de las tecnologías de comunicación en línea y digitales. El acceso a dichos medios también ha brindado oportunidades de producción y publicación para los artistas, especialmente aquellos que se identifican con demográficos marginados, excluidos o previamente ignorados, como la comunidad transgénero.

Dada la relación situacional entre estas tecnologías y los artistas trans, esta investigación plantea la pregunta de cómo y qué utiliza, produce o publica un artista trans como la autora de este trabajo, como parte de una práctica creativa multimedia, y postula que existen características compartidas que existen entre muchas experiencias transexuales y experiencias postmedia.

Para responder a estas preguntas de investigación, este texto despliega y combina voces subjetivas y críticas dentro de un modelo exegético conectivo. Los nuevos conocimientos representados por el trabajo y los procesos de la práctica creativa relacionada son analizados a través del desarrollo y la aplicación de conceptos existentes de fenomenología transgénero. Y, en última instancia, la propia misión de este texto se presenta como una acción autoetnográfica y una declaración política de la experiencia vivida.

RESUM

Malgrat el creixent desenvolupament d'estudis sobre persones transgènere a àmbits particulars, des de principi de la dècada de 1990, sols a l'última dècada s'ha experimentat un creixement explosiu de la visibilitat de persones transgènere a la cultura popular d'occident. La rapidesa del progrés, en comparació amb els moviments socials anteriors, és deguda en gran part a la ubiqüitat de les tecnologies de comunicació en línia i digitals. L'accés als susdits mitjans també ha brindat oportunitats de producció i publicacions per als artistes, especialment aquells que s'identifiquen amb demografies marginals, exclosos o prèviament ignorats, com la comunitat transgènere.

Donada la relació situacional entre aquestes tecnologies i els artistes trans, aquesta investigació planteja la pregunta de com i què utilitza, produeix o publica un artista trans com l'autora d'aquest treball, com part d'una pràctica creativa multimedia i postula que existeixen característiques compartides entre nombroses experiències transexuals i postmedia.

Pera respondre aquestes qüestions d'investigació, aquest text desenvolupa i combina veus subjectives i crítiques dintre d'un model exegetic connectiu. Els nous coneixements representats pel treball i els processos de la pràctica creativa relacionada són analitzats a través del desenvolupament i l'aplicació de conceptes existents de fenomenologia transgènere. I, en última instància, la pròpia missió d'aquest text es presenta com una acció autoetnogràfica i una declaració política de l'experiència viscuda.

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INTRODUCTION

Preface

As I write this, in 2019, it is the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots¹. New York City has announced that a monument will be erected honoring Martha P. Johnson and Silvia Rivera, two trans activists at the heart of the uprising that was the genesis of the Pride movement.

When I first considered researching trans artists back in 2009, the obstacles were overwhelming, and ultimately the entire project ultimately proved impossible for me, given the state of affairs: namely, I had not yet come out yet as transgender, and therefore did not have the confidence or support network in place to even begin pursuing any academic research existing at that time. All I was aware of was the invisibility of transgender people in society, save for being the butt of jokes in various movies, sitcoms or stand-up comedy routines (Keegan, 2016). The “T” in LGBT might have been added back in the late 90’s, but that doesn’t mean that they were necessarily wanted- not by the gay community (who were busy fighting for their own civil rights and many of whom wanted to defend being gay as more compatible with heteronormativity than other, visibly trans or queer demographics) and certainly not by mainstream society². Save for a few brave, visible trailblazers, most trans people were still

¹ Stonewall, Johnson and Rivera are discussed in Chapter 1.

² For example, this 2007 article by John Aravosis for salon.com (Aravosis, 2007).

either hiding by denying who they were, or hiding in plain sight by being “read” as cisgender, or biologically “correct” males and females³. Even though the gay community in the US was still awaiting the verdict of their push for legal protection and equal rights, they had largely won the pop-culture war already (inasmuch as that is possible in the face of conservative and religious pushback). Certainly in the arts, we were well past the point where it was of any interest or relevance to point out that the artist exhibiting in some gallery was gay or not. The documentation of gay artists- exhibitions, inventories, critiques, retrospectives, interviews- was already legion by that point in time. There is no shortage of visibility or literature on gay artists. But gay and transgender are not synonymous, *at all*. What I wanted to research, to know more about, to dive into, to investigate, in order to both contextualize and understand my own practice as an artist, was *not* gay artists, which would have been largely redundant even ten years ago, but trans artists. And for that, I simply was not able, due to my social situation, to access the data and academic literature that was already available at the time⁴

What has changed globally, specifically since 2012, is the explosion of trans visibility and an ongoing dialogue [or perhaps more poignantly, an ongoing fight] about rights, as well as corresponding additional academic research and literature. Transgender Studies Quarterly was first published By Duke University in 2014 (Stryker and Currah, 2014). It was the first non-medical

³ Although terms will be defined as they are used throughout the text, in the annex there is also a glossary that provides further explication of words like “cisgender,” (which is simply the opposite of transgender, i.e. there is a correlation between biological sex and internalized gender) and other gender and technology terms.

⁴*Phenomenology as Method in Trans Studies* by Henry Rubin in the GLQ (A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies) by Duke University Press in 1998 (Rubin, 1998); various articles by Viviane Namaste throughout the 90’s and 2000’s (Namaste, 1996; Namaste, 2000; Namaste, 2009); and the original publication in 2009 of Talia Bettcher’s Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Bettcher, 2014) to name a few that have proven relevant to this project.

journal for transgender studies, focusing instead on cultural issues (Kelleway, 2014). Individual trans scholars writing on trans issues since then are too numerous to list here. Media technologies and publishing platforms have also exploded in popularity and prevalence -bear in mind that YouTube was only four years old in 2009.

And that is important, for besides whatever otherwise-existing gestalt was responsible for the trans movement, social media platforms absolutely played a pivotal role in connecting isolated individuals into a global community, normalizing what might in the absence of that solidarity feel like an overwhelming burden of *differentness* that was best kept hidden. Timing in regards to technology is exactly why the push for trans rights has happened so much more suddenly and socially visibly than the [ongoing] gay rights movement, the beginnings of which obviously predate the birth of the social media paradigm shift (Facebook, YouTube, etc.) and which only in the last decade or so was able to use mass media like television to normalize gay identities through sitcom characters. Much like Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Martin, D. and Joomis, K., 2007 pp72-75), trans people first used social media to worry about fundamentals like food, shelter and safety [and still do]. Only when existence isn't threatened can higher functions like self-expression blossom, like the "YouTube Trans Vlog" as a genre (Horak, 2014, p.573). And perhaps as a possible, ultimate goal, a de-prioritisation of identity politics- e.g., when being gay or trans is not the main qualifier of an individual, when it is no longer dramatized, demonized or considered unusual, someone like Tim Cook can be the head of Apple, and gay only incidentally. In the same way, the situation has evolved significantly in the ten years since I first wanted to research trans artists as a context of my own work, from a point where even finding or identifying

trans artists was a needle-in-a-haystack venture, to there being exhibitions exclusively of trans artists in museums and galleries around the world; and finally to today, when people are having discourses on whether a work of art necessarily has to refer or in some way overtly acknowledge the “trans-ness” of the artist (Getsy, 2015a).

This is due in part because of the reduced cost and ubiquity as predicted by Moore’s Law- as a result, financial restrictions top access to media outlets and technologies have been, to a large extent, eliminated (Kurzweil, 1999). This increased access has advanced both the postmedia narration in creative practices like the one that this research is concerned with, and transgender visibility in general. Not only are there more self-identified, “out” trans artists (as well as actors, musicians, photographers, etc.) but there is also more content *about* transgender/gender nonconforming /nonbinary people/children, created by *non-trans* (i.e., cisgender) people. *This* is not about *that*. Art *about* trans, genderfluid or nonbinary people isn’t necessarily the same as *art by trans artists*. It’s a question of narrative authority (Bettcher, 2009). The theoretical component of this investigation is interested in the latter, and how a trans perspective, trans embodied cognition and concepts of self affect or shape the related creative practice.

That said, I have for some time now argued that the straw on the proverbial trans-camel’s back, the wave that broke the social-etiquette dam holding back the swelling trans movement, was the 2012 article in Rolling Stone about the relatively unknown [compared to, say, Rolling Stones’ own list of Top Artists that year, including the likes of Jack White, Green Day and Bruce Springsteen] lead singer of punk rock band *Against Me!*, Laura Jane Grace, *née* Tom Gabel (Eells, 2012). A friend actually mailed a ripped-out copy of the article

to me, all the way across the Atlantic. Its arrival was surprising, possibly lifesaving, and as it turns out, auspicious.

Grace's candid interview came a year after I had undergone my first Male-to-Female (or MtF) surgeries⁵. I had already stopped performing onstage two years earlier while I struggled to come to grips with the social repercussions of "coming out" and openly, socially identifying as trans, as well as beginning the path to transitioning. Her bravery in telling such a visceral, brutally honest account of *what it feels like* was the first time that another trans person's personal account truly resonated with me, made me feel *not-alone*, made the whole process seem manageable and within a scale of bearableness⁶. That exposure in such an established, trendsetting, star-making pop culture magazine, regardless of whatever detractors and "trolls," normalized the trans identity and stuck a flag in the social landscape saying, "we exist." *Against Me!*'s first album that credited Laura Jane Grace instead of Gabel, *Transgender Dysphoria Blues*, was released in January of 2014 (Grace & Ozzi, 2016). But by then the dam had burst and the trans movement had exploded across the social landscape, both online and in real life. While conservative elements were arguing over which bathrooms and pronouns should be used, liberal arts communities were hosting exhibitions of trans artists.

⁵ When discussing transgender people, typical shorthand refers to biological males who identify as, or transition to, female, i.e. Male-to-Female (MtF), or biological females who identify or transition to males, i.e. Female-to-Male (FtM). It should be noted that these terms apply to individuals who identify within the gender binary; although "transgender" can apply to many other nonbinary categories, many feel comfortably located within it, despite assertions by (typically non-trans [cisgender] writers like Butler that trans people have some sort obligation to transgress the gender binary (Bettcher, 2014).

⁶ A self-serving reference to my MFA exegesis, *Something It Is Like* (Koss, 2006), which in itself was a nod to the work by David Chalmers and *What Is It Like To Be A Bat?* by Thomas Nagel (Nagel, 1974).

AGAINST ME!
TRANSGENDER DYSPHORIA BLUES



fig. 1. Cover art, Transgender Dysphoria Blues by Against Me!

So, by 2015, the social and academic landscapes had changed considerably, and with it, the contextual data available and freedom to research my own practice as a trans artist. An inventory of trans artists was now possible, a review of their bodies of work, and an investigation into any existing, developing, and possibly evolving, commonly shared themes, motifs or ways of working (Candy, 2018). It meant it was now possible to contextualize and frame the practice and body of work associated with this research within a larger community of trans artists.

Not only *has* the landscape changed considerably, but it is *still* changing rapidly. As a sense of trans community becomes codified, certain vernacular [or even tenses of words] become more acceptable or more widely used and other, older terminology [even if only ten years old] gets retired. Ideas about gender

are evolving at just as rapid a pace, at least in the more progressive circles of the younger generations: an embrace of “gender fluidity” and association with nonbinary labels means that someone who might have been labeled “transsexual” decades ago (Rubin, 1998) now might consider themselves to be any one of a handful of nonbinary, a-gender, fluid, nonstatic labels. Because of this, during the course of this investigation, I myself have had to adjust my own definition of transgender or *trans**, and now acknowledge and use it as the umbrella term it is more widely interpreted to be, and have had to revert, however reluctantly, to using *transsexual* as someone who has specifically changed their gender and social role, be that through whatever combination of legal documentation, dress and presentation, and hormonal and surgical intervention. So, in a very real way, the same zeitgeist and socio-cultural change that has made this research now possible, also confounds efforts to accurately pin down, specifically define and identify the terminology that the research relies upon. It is, essentially, *queering* my efforts to categorise and label, to “set things straight.” But as will be argued in the forthcoming chapters on Queer Phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006), and a proposed further, subjective development of a Trans* Phenomenology, that might not be such a bad thing.

This research, whether you want to call it an “experimental thesis” or a “connective exegesis” (Hamilton and Jaaniste, 2010), has developed out of the fascination inherent in my creative practice with the physiology of the body and mind, the theory of embodied cognition (Johnson, 2007), and the concepts of plasticity, multiplicity and successiveness in identities (Getsy, 2015a), concepts that technology to some extent promises or at least implies. In many ways, this research is a natural continuation of my MFA thesis, despite the fact that it contained no overt references to gender identity per se, but rather explorations

into the increasing intimacy between biological and technological systems and the possibilities of nonbinary existence that future technologies hold (Kurzweil, 2005), both medical and informational.⁷ As for the concept of embodied cognition and its relevance to this topic of a particular subset of artists, this will be discussed more in the paragraphs concerning Methodology in this introduction.

⁷ Koss, K. (2006). *Something It Is Like*. (MFA). National College of Art & Design, Dublin, Ireland.

Hypotheses and Objectives

This research proposes to explore transgender lived experience through the creative practice. The expected trajectory of this research posits that postmedia experiences and transgender existences share fundamental characteristics, and that new qualitative knowledge will be produced by the practice and through the analysis of results and processes. By means of the research and reflective analysis presented herein, I expect to achieve the following:

To understand and explicate the original knowledge developed and achieved through the critical and subjective analysis of the constituent processes and productions of this practice-based research; how those results represent an authentic lived trans experience and the social importance of increased trans visibility.

To relate and locate this practice-based research within a precedential field of postmedia artists' practices as well as previous autobiographical work, identifying any recurring or shared themes, motivations, perspectives, aesthetics, lines of

inquiry, and other relationships or differences between this project and that context of identified precedents.

To develop a historical, contextual, and conceptual orientation for that framework by presenting both a sociopolitical historic narrative of trans participation in western popular culture, as well as the effects and influence that a postmedia environment has had on the trans community.

Methodology, Voicing, Structure and Sources

A method for reading trans narratives must be akin to the trans experience itself... a methodology must offer a positive account of gender as a lived experience, irreducible to the body, rather than a medicalized problem of having the “wrong body.” Finally, it must leave room for individuality and self-creation, as the trans experience is unique and not bound together by strict “official history” but operates through self-creation.

(Baldino, 2015, p165).

As appropriate for a practice-based research project, I utilise a multidisciplinary methodological approach for the review and analysis in the various parts of this text, ultimately to provide the information necessary to situate and analyze the results of the practice. The structure of the paper and the development of the individual parts reflect the sections typically found within a connective exegetical model. These may vary in form in presentation but typically include (in addition to an introduction and conclusion) the *situating concepts*, the *precedents of practice*, and the *researcher’s creative practice*.

(Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010 p34). However, rather than the polyvocality often used (Hamilton, 2011), I experimentally apply a more consistent voice throughout, for several reasons. Firstly, the switches between voicing can sometimes be jarring and create an experience that feels like reading distinct, disjointed texts rather than a unified whole (ibid). A coherent text that is methodically laid out as a logical, yet engaging narrative is exactly what I attempt to present, as an action and product of the research itself. Therefore I present this in a slightly more casual, subjective tone that makes the new knowledge and results available to a wider audience, while still adhering to the rigorous academic standards of reference and argumentation within practice-based research (Candy, 2006). As such, academic or peer-reviewed texts and publications are the primary source of external references; for popular, recent and current subject matters, or topics that are peripheral to the focus of the research but still merit some notation, online resources are used as I see fit and appropriate.

As someone who registers on the autism spectrum, this is an experimental voicing for me, as my “purely subjective” verbalization can seem detached and “dry.” Regardless of the vocalization of the research as a reflective practitioner, different explicit methods are still necessary and obligatory to best apprehend and detail the information in each part.

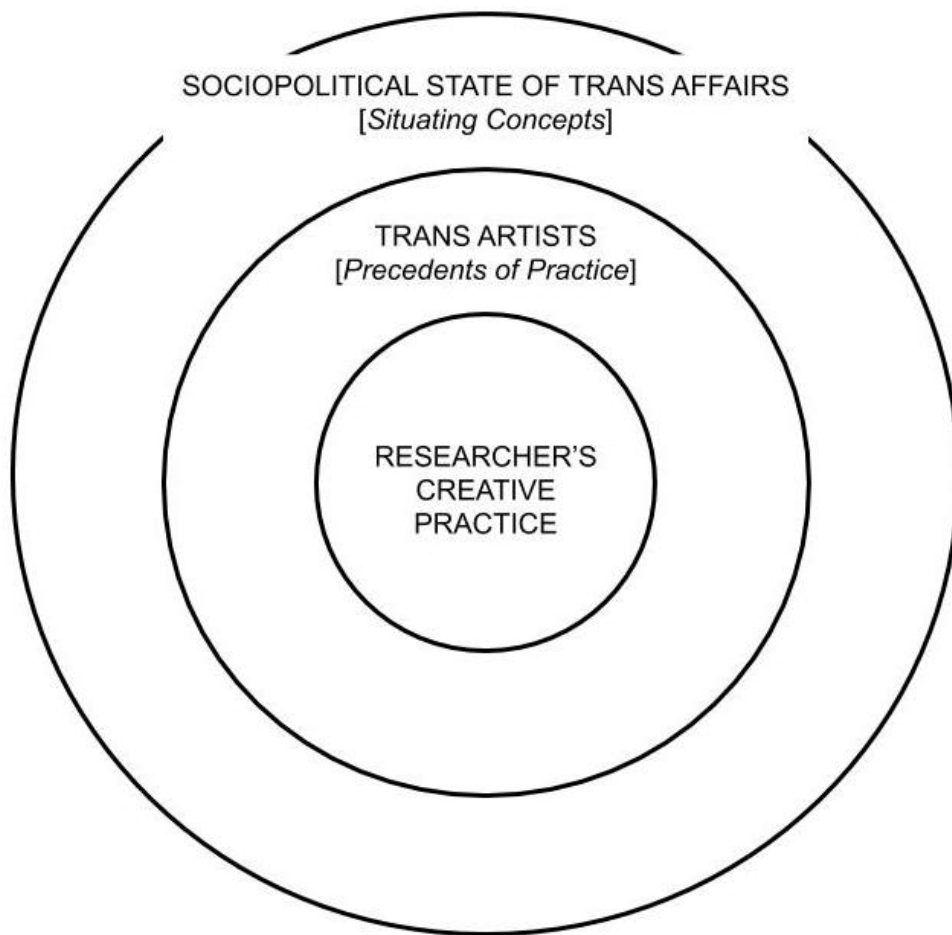


Fig. 2. Structure of the Thesis

The State of Affairs (Part I) presents the *situating concepts* for the research of this practice, applying situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) and review. Specific, technical, or perhaps unfamiliar terms and words introduced from various fields covered in each chapter will be explained as they appear; an explication of each can also be found in the Glossary of Terms in the appendix. The authors and researchers presented will be briefly introduced to familiarize the reader with their positions in their respective fields.

The socio-political, historical context is presented in Chapter 1: *The Social Con[Text] and Trans Her-story*⁸. This illustrates the encompassing sphere of western culture within which the research and other, more specific contextual frameworks are located. In this chapter I also introduce the complicated, debatable relationship between the idea of inherent gender traits, or *essentialism*, and *performativity*, concept of gender as culturally learned or a “performed” identity, as proposed in feminist theories (Butler, 1990). However, I also discuss the critical responses by trans writers to this feminist dismissal or refutation of essentialism and the idea of stable gender identities (Bettcher, 2014; Ton, 2018), of which these arguments and criticisms are typically ignorant or dismissive. Chapter 2: *Postmedia Narratives and Trans [In]Visibility* explicates the theoretical and technological concepts that frame the relationship between trans artists and a postmedia environment. It is here that I first propose and detail the specific themes and ways of experiencing that confound aforementioned essentialism argument. Finally, Chapter 3: *Embodied Cognition and Trans* Phenomenology* outlines the scientific theory of consciousness that underpins this research (Johnson, 2007) and the subjective analytical process, Trans* Phenomenology (Rubin, 1998; Keegan, 2016), that is expounded and expanded upon during the reviews in Parts II and III.

Part II: The State of the Art presents the *precedents of practice*. This includes select artists’ practices, and prior products of my practice. This framework for the practice-based research is developed through critical content analysis and contextual review, illustrative documentation, and a subjective analysis that both uses and further develops the extant Trans* Phenomenology.

⁸ “Her-story” is a nod to Chris Vargas’ Museum of Trans Hirstory & Art (sfmotha.org).

Sara Ahmed is introduced and discussed further in Part I, but for now it is worth noting that Ahmed states in *Queer Phenomenology*, “...phenomenology makes ‘orientation’ central in the very argument that consciousness is always directed ‘toward’ an object,” and has an “emphasis on the lived experience of inhabiting a body” (Ahmed, 2006 p.2). She goes on to make the argument that gender can be understood as a bodily orientation, as bodies “get directed by their actions over time,” inasmuch as gender informs our interests and, therefore, actions (ibid. p. 60). If Ahmed argues that we can “queer” phenomenology, or that Queer Phenomenology can happen through deviating the typical “orientation” of the body towards an object; *and* if she argues, as was just noted, that gender is a bodily orientation, then it stands to reason that a *transgender* body (and identity/mind) apprehends phenomena from a *trans* orientation; and *that* orientation, or way of apprehending phenomena- *my* orientation and apprehension- can help further develop a Trans* Phenomenology.

Since phenomenological analysis is subjective, the previously mentioned argument between essentialism and performativity is moot, as I am apprehending the practices from my own personal orientation. Not to codify the “trans experience” or determine its origin, but simply to identify possible similarities, distinctions, and further relationships between the field of selected art practices and this research. The act of identification itself necessarily indicates the processes, content and forms that are inherently important to this research, as does the field of artists.

Although the initial selection might be somewhat intuitive or exploratory, depending on what I find meaningful to the research, I have established some criteria to facilitate the paring of presented practices. Parameters include what

is considered a “postmedia” practice (Guattari, 1996), as well as who is recognized (identifies) as “trans.” At least for the purpose of this research, “Trans artists” should be interpreted to include self-identified Queer, “two-spirit,” Male-to-Female [MtF] or Female-to-Male [FtM] individuals, or other identities that fall within the larger Trans* spectrum (as discussed earlier on in the Introduction and in the Glossary of Words in the appendix).

Adhering to the parameter of postmedia practices, I am eschewing “traditional” or medium-oriented arts practices and bodies of work that fall solely within one field, instead focusing the review on artists who have embraced a postmedia approach or ethos in their work. In other words, these creative practices are *message-focused* rather than *medium-centric*; the artist is using whatever materials or media deemed most appropriate for the transmission of the message rather than presenting an exclusive and dedicated body of, for example, online glitch art or oil paintings on canvas. They are multidisciplinary and consistently (although not necessarily constantly) utilize online presence or digital technologies in the production or publication of their work (this also applies to the prior results from my practice which are included to provide additional precedence and chronological orientation).

...the post-medium condition applies not to a general state that artists are working within, but only to certain artists – those that invent their own mediums by de-railing traditional conventions of a (or multiple combination of) given support (s).

Julia Chang (Columbia.edu, 2006).

What is important about such practices is that, in the context of thinking post-medium through post-media, artists working ‘after the Internet’ do not necessarily situate their practice online, nor do they work exclusively with the digital, even while they are critically invested in it. Instead, these practices straddle a variety of media – including painting, performance, writing, installation and analogue technologies – posing questions beyond the traditional discourses of art and technology

(Kinsey, 2013 pp44-61)

Consequently and by necessity, other parameters for inclusion in this inventory are then that the artists are (or have been up until recently) currently practicing, and have either been published, i.e. exhibited physically or virtually, or maintain some online presence (website or social media site, news articles, available digital copies of work such as videos). This also means that in addition to traditional academic texts and exhibition catalogs, references for Part II also necessarily include, as previously defended, digital resources such as museum, gallery and artist websites, and contemporary online news articles. When possible, contact has been made with the artists presented in the review, mostly to verify personal details or preferred pronouns.

Part III: Transeverythingism presents the body of work, the research of the *creative practice* central to this investigation. I provide a discursive narrative of the creative processes of development; illustrative documentation of the artifacts and production; and a critical review of the key elements and themes evident in the practice, identifying any continuities or discontinuities present in

those themes. The practice is similarly apprehended through transgender phenomenological analysis, and relationally contextualized within the precedents of practices. Entire exhibitions or individual productions that constitute this new body of knowledge are presented in separate chapters. The subjective analysis is supported by literature and gallery maps of the individual exhibitions, documented commentary by colleagues and media reviews.

As a reference to narrativity, various chapters lead with a quote from an external source, when it is deemed interesting or of particular relevance to the subject matter, or topical reflections by myself. Additionally, in the spirit of this investigation, and in order to address the shortcomings and inabilities inherent in using such traditional narrative media (i.e. static text and visuals), QR codes will be inserted as appropriate to bridge the medial gap, both as links to audiovisual and video/moving-image content, as well as visual artifacts themselves, elements created as part of the text-as-action (Kress, 2003).

Part I: State of Affairs: The Situating Concepts

Chapter 1: The Social Con[Text] and Trans Her-story

Despite the fact that trans and gay identities are very different concepts, they have historically been conflated so much that we cannot present the current state of affairs of trans rights and identities without backtracking a little bit to cover why they were conflated, and when and how [and because of whom] they finally began to disentangle from each other. Trans history and visibility is convoluted and caught up in gay rights history primarily because when anyone non-straight is considered deviant at best, and most likely have had their identity rendered illegal, it isn't a situation that generally calls for a larger lexicon, further distinction, more categories or a nuanced understanding.

Because of this, even when the term "transsexual" started surfacing in the 1950's [mostly due to the sensation and gossip surrounding Christine Jorgensen, one of the first trans women to have Sexual Reassignment Surgery in the US], it was still widely conflated, interchanged or confused with "gay" and "transvestite" (Ekins & King edit, 1996, p. 86). This also illustrates the ambivalence, ignorance, or disinterest at the time (and even currently) to disentangle notions of gender and sexuality, which is what ultimately had to happen in order for a distinct trans movement and visibility. As author and art

historian David Getsy states, “Transgender capacity does not derive from sexuality” (Getsy, 2015a, p. 38)

Gay and trans identities have both existed (either named or unnamed, depending on cultural mores and inclinations) for as long as societies themselves; there are innumerable anecdotes and accounts of representatives from both categories in almost every period of history and in virtually every culture.⁹ Thankfully, this review doesn’t have to go back that far, as in order to orient this practice. What is important is the contemporary culture, the recent factors and events that worked towards [or worked towards preventing] Western societies getting here, to this moment. At the time of the 1960’s, they still largely looked towards the United States as a cultural leader; therefore, a crucial event and a good place to start is the Stonewall Riots.

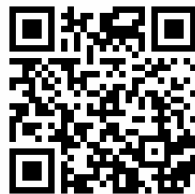


fig. 3. The Stonewall Riots Explained. YouTube.

Although The Stonewall Riots, or The Stonewall Uprising, is considered to be *the* watershed moment that heralded in the modern Gay Rights Movement, for

⁹ Trans identities appear in ancient history throughout Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe, with the first recorded evidence coming from ancient Asian civilizations (lgbtqnation.com, 2016b). Even queens and emperors through time have practiced transvestism (cbc.ca, 2018). Terms like “transgender” or even “gay” are new constructs due to the influence of Western colonialism upon indigenous cultures that had originally recognized more than two gender, sexes or even sexualities (“A Map of Gender-Diverse Cultures,” pbs.org, 2015).

better and worse it was also, arguably, the pinpoint marker in time where the gay community started, or started considering splintering into smaller factions.

In June of 1969 the police performed what they likely assumed was yet another in a fairly common and long line of raids on “homophile” establishments, this time at the Stonewall Inn (D’Emilio, 2004). In the 1950s and 60s, early gay groups were already trying to defend the “assimilation” of hetero-normative homosexuals- men who “looked and acted” like men, and women who looked and acted the part, implying they were more-normal or at least more tolerable in society than their gender-deviant or “queer” brethren (Ziyad, 2016). This has never fully disappeared as an internal LGBT issue (Winter, 2011). So it is particularly noteworthy that it was the most visibly... *obvious* patrons of Stonewall that night that were the gunpowder that incited that riot which was the catalyst for much of the social change that followed. Stonewall sold alcohol without a license (which was ostensibly one of the “legitimate” reasons for the police raid, besides the fact it was owned by the mafia), which made it popular with poor and most marginalized individuals in the gay community: drag queens, transgender people, effeminate young men, butch lesbians, male prostitutes and homeless youth” (Frizzell, 2013). Despite the sacrifices and effort put in by gender-nonconforming people, many cisgender [non-trans], hetero-performing gay men (and women) were all too happy to start distancing themselves from the more visibly “deviant” members of the queer community (Matos, 2013). Two of the names still recognized to this day from the riots are those of Marsha P. Johnson and Silvia Rivera.¹⁰ Despite the importance of gender-variant characters like her during the Stonewall Uprising,

¹⁰ The Death And Life of Marsha P. Johnson is a documentary that came out in 2017 (imdb.com, 2018b). France, D. & Blane, M. (Producers), & France, D. (Director). (2017). *The Death and Life of Martha P. Johnson*. USA: Public Square Films.

there is an argument to be made that the birth of transgender activism actually happened a few years earlier during the 1966 Compton Cafeteria Riot in San Francisco, as that raid by police specifically targeted for arrest any men wearing women's clothing (Stryker, 2008).



fig. 4. The First Pride Parade in NYC

Regardless, the first Gay Pride parade commemorated Stonewall a year later in 1970, and in 2015 the Stonewall Inn was granted landmark status (Fink, 2018). As mentioned in the Preface, during the fiftieth anniversary of the Uprising in 2019, New York City announced a monument to be erected to Johnson and Rivera (Jacobs, 2019).

From 1966-69, trans identities drifted in and out of public visibility, most notably coming to popular attention in 1977 with the U.S. Supreme Court case of tennis star Renée Richards; after gossip quieted down again, a trans identity

wasn't presented as a protagonist in a pop-culture story again until around 1993, with the gruesome death of FTM trans male Brandon Teena.¹¹ Unfortunately, from then on and for almost a decade almost any trans visibility in media was predominantly about homicide (of either trans people or their partners), or using them as the butt of jokes in movies, sitcoms and comedy routines.¹² In her book *Whipping Girl*, Julia Serano explains these very trans stereotypes presented in media:

Media depictions of trans women, whether they take form of fictional characters or actual people, usually fall under one of two main archetypes: the “deceptive transsexual” or the “pathetic transsexual.” While characters based on both models are presented as having a vested interest in achieving an ultrafeminine appearance, they differ in their abilities to pull it off. Because the “deceivers” successfully pass as women, they generally act as unexpected plot twists, or play the role of sexual predators who fool innocent straight guys into falling for other ‘men.’ (Serano, 2007 p36).

It should be noted that this scenario- “I was tricked”- is often the defense given by men who are discovered to have relationships with trans women, and consequently why there is such an unusually large percentage of homicides and violence by partners of trans women.

¹¹ *Boys Don't Cry*, starring Hilary Swank as Brandon Teena, was released in 1999. Peirce, K. & Bienen, A. (Writers) & Peirce, K. (Director). (1999). *Boys Don't Cry*. USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures.

¹² *25 Years of Transphobia in Comedy* by Meredith Talusan (Talusan, 2016).

Despite the general acceptance of the idea of “a transsexual” back in the 1950s and 60s, perhaps due to the newness, or because it was a society still enamored with science, the decades thereafter actually, in fact, reverted to a hostile, suspicious and dismissive attitude towards trans identities, people whom were largely at that point –and still today- considered mentally ill.

Under the radar of mainstream culture, however, progress, support and collaboration continued unabated, and between 2002 and 2003, the Transgender Law Center and the National Center for Transgender Equality were both founded in the US. During the *next* ten years, individual stories of interest continue to surface, yet despite a growing frequency, they are just isolated incidents or individuals, still largely ridiculed or seen as the “weird news story of the day,” and still without the support structure of a visible, larger social movement to champion and defend them (Penny, 2014). Trans authors continued to write autobiographies, quasi-DIY gender-deconstruction-instruction-manuals and manifestos for the envisioned gender revolution- Kate Bornstein and her *Gender Outlaws*, Julia Serano, Susan Stryker, Leslie Feinberg, Max Wolf Valerio, and even allies like Helen Boyd continued to offer some hope and connection, an outreached hand in the vacuum of a vibrant, easily accessible network.

Despite, or more likely because of, the previous introduction of the few brave and fortunate trans individuals in mainstream media (actresses Candis Cayne and Laverne Cox; Chaz Bono, trans son of Cher; trans models like Isis King and Jenna Talackova; political figures such as Stu Rasmussen, Kim Coco, Amanda Simpson et al; journalists like Janet Mock and Paris Lees, amongst others) the

glass wall between a visible trans community and mainstream culture finally and irrevocably shattered by 2012.¹³ Less than two years later it was announced by *Time Magazine* that we had reached the “Trans Tipping Point” (Steinmetz, 2014).

That might sound more idyllic than it was, or is. In a 2015 editorial, *The New York Times* started off their article:

A generation ago, transgender Americans were widely regarded as deviants, unfit for dignified workplaces, a disgrace for families. Those who confided in relatives were, by and large, pitied and shunned. For most, transitioning on the job was tantamount to career suicide. Medical procedures to align a person’s body with that person’s gender identity — an internal sense of being male, female or something else — were a fringe specialty, available only to a few who paid out of pocket. (Ed., nytimes.com, 2015)

Unfortunately, for the majority of trans people –in both the United States as well as a disappointing number of EU countries- *all* of that is still as true today as it was “a generation ago.” Murder rates for trans people –specifically, trans woman (and more specifically, trans women of color)- continue to rise every year in the United States since 2014 (Allen, 2018). It should also be noted that the “official” murder rates are almost always lower than the actual number of

¹³ The list of trans people who have influenced or contributed to modern culture is exhaustingly long, and includes a great number of people performing groundbreaking work behind the scenes in less glamorous or visible fields than actors or musicians- Martine Rothblatt is the founder of Sirius XM Radio; Wendy Carlos was the composer for *A Clockwork Orange*. Angelica Ross is the CEO of TransTech Social Enterprises, that aims to educate and place trans people in tech jobs (Rowley, 2015).

crimes, as the media, police or authorities, and even families routinely mis-gender or ignore the trans identity of the victims (mic.com, 2016). Even worse, many murders go unreported because the victim has been cut off from family, is possibly homeless and therefore acquaintances are used to them “drifting,” or because the murders are often times so incredibly violent that it takes more time than usual to find or identify the bodies. Although most victims are shot, the vehemence evident in many of the murders, worldwide, is disturbing, with many stabbed, burned, and drowned, often with their bodies raped, or genitalia and faces mangled. In Arkansas, trans woman Marcal Camero Tye was shot dead and dragged under a car (Mann, 2011). Guarav Gopalan was beaten to death in Washington, D.C. (Broverman, 2011). Seventeen-year-old Ally Ally Steinfeld was stabbed and set on fire; original reports mis-gendered her and referred to her by her dead name (Russell, 2017). There are too many cases even more gruesome to list.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, transwomen in the US are 4.3 times more likely to be murdered than ciswomen (Holter, 2017). 48% of trans people have experienced verbal or physical violence because of their identity, and 47% have been sexually assaulted, 10% of those within the last year prior to being surveyed (Ziyad, 2016). Trans people face disproportionately higher chances of being homeless, especially youth; almost a third of those who seek housing from shelters are turned away, almost half are forced to stay in shelters for the gender different than their identity, 55% were harassed and 22% were sexually assaulted (Ford, 2015). In the UK, one in eight employed trans people have been attacked by a coworker or customer (Lees, 2018). It’s important to stress that statistic is out of *employed* trans people: trans unemployment rates are double the national average in the US, and around *three times* as high as the

2008 national average in the UK (Booth, 2016). Over twenty-one “anti-trans” or “bathroom bills”- forcing people to use the bathroom that corresponds to the sex on their birth certificate, or in some way creating a loophole for discrimination against trans- were introduced for US legislative vote in 2018 (transequality.org, 2018). Only twenty states have laws that protect against discrimination based on gender identity (Swarecki, 2017). Just over half of EU countries have some sort of similar non-discrimination laws in place covering employment, housing or services (tgeu.org, 2016).



fig. 5. John Oliver on Last Week Tonight discussing trans people. YouTube.

These statistics generally come as a surprise to people who might feel trans people have in fact crossed that “tipping point” and assume they have the same rights and opportunities as the general public. However, a 2017 Pew Research Center survey indicated that a third of Americans felt society had gone too far in accepting trans people (Silva, 2017). According to other surveys in the same year, 27% said they would not be friends with a trans person, and over 80% said that they would not date someone who is trans; 21% believe being trans is a mental illness, and 39% percent believe it is a choice (Bame, 2017). Many people (who are not medical professionals) who vociferously claim that

identifying as transgender is an illness, cite statistics such as what a high percentage of trans people attempt suicide or have a history of self harm (McNeil, Ellis & Eccles, 2017).

However, considering the circumstances, there is a fairly obvious argument that suicidal behaviour is not an inherent feature of a transgender identity, but rather a desperate response to overwhelmingly negative conditions and existential threats. Contradicting the claim that being trans is a mental disorder or that trans people are inherently suicidal or unstable, 2016 research showed that trans children who were allowed to socially identify with their internal gender [names, pronouns, clothes, activities] had rates of depression and anxiety no higher than their cisgender counterparts, with one of the authors of the study, Katie McLaughlin, stating that their findings “suggest that mental health problems are not inevitable in this group, and that family support might buffer these children from the onset of mental health problems so commonly observed in transgender people” (Bach, 2016).

It’s worth reiterating at this point that the Millennial and Generation-Z attitude towards ideas of gender is much more fluid, generally speaking, than the overwhelming outlook of even Generation X constituents. As stated in the introduction, there were necessary adjustments on how to interpret and apply the terminology in this research (that, in turn, fundamentally changed which artists would be included in the case studies). Now, although there might be a larger percentage of the younger population that embraces fluidity, or at least eschews fixed labels of gender and sexuality, that isn’t to say that there haven’t always been gender-fluid, genderqueer, nonbinary people; what has arguably always been the case, though, is that they have usually remained invisible compared to their more “culturally mainstream” counterparts:

Trans visibility is not playing out in the mainstream. Transgender visibility is playing out wonderfully, marvelously, amazingly, mind-blowingly – but that’s maybe 20% of all trans people who believe that they’re really men or really women and this is what I have to do in order to achieve authentic identity. There are a whole lot more people who don’t do trans that way, and they’re just as invisible as ever — the same way they were invisible in the early gay rights movement, the same way they were invisible in early feminist movements. The same people have been invisibilized in every sexuality and gender movement we’ve been able to document, and those are variations on sissy men and butch women, who I would call the most unloved outlaws. But people who tend to blend things, who tend to mix things up- In terms of what is all of this transgender visibility doing, it’s a double edged sword just like everything is. It’s terrific for people who’ve always known they were a man or a woman but didn’t have the body that matched it, but it’s not so good for people who don’t think that way – it’s actually setting an impossible standard. – Kate Bornstein (Nichols, 2015)

Besides familial and parental support, other elements such as positive role models, a peer group or support network for information sharing, and opportunities to “speak with an authentic voice,” “speak one’s truth,” or in some

way express oneself, perhaps especially when a person is nonbinary or gender nonconforming, as Bornstein notes above, are also vitally important in the development of healthy(-ier) individuals and, consequently, a healthier trans community. How information technologies and the postmedia condition have created this opportunity for trans artists and nonartists alike, the challenge and opportunity to be visible and invisible interchangeably or even at the same time, is one of the subjects of the next chapter.

However, before discussing themes such as [in]visibility and others in the next chapter, as well as in the reviews of trans narratives of Parts II and III, what first needs to be addressed is the popular [mis?]interpretation of gender performativity as put forth by Judith Butler and others, the (perceived) feminist/sociological argument of social constructivism against “essentialism,” and the various trans responses to these positions.

Judith Butler is the feminist writer and theorist who coined the term “gender performativity” in her book, *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990). It is a term that she herself admits is often misunderstood, mis-defined and misapplied. She clarifies a difference between *performance*, which can be understood as a conscious portrayal or “taking on” of a role, and *performativity*, which by her account is sort of a condition of repetitive action that takes place continually and without a necessarily conscious participation of the subject (Butler, 2011). She argues that the reiterative, repetitive set of actions exist *prior* to, and give rise to, the identity; the person doesn’t give us a performance, but rather the performativity gives us the person (ibid). The main takeaway is that gender traits are socially-created, learned roles; that gendering is an external, social action (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2013) and not some sort of internal natural state or predisposition.

As a philosophical concept, Gender performativity fits within the larger, earlier theory of “Social Constructivism,” which posits that a lot of what is tacitly considered inherent, objective truths (or, *essential* natures of things) are in fact constructs of language and society (Marecek, Crawford and Popp, 2004).

However, if social constructivists are correct to put language before lived experience as the root source of knowledge, then the authenticity of trans identities is problematized.

If Butler’s earlier work (1990) is correct when it only ambiguously distinguishes trans people from drag queens, and when it suggests they act either to intentionally subvert or intentionally to comply with social contrivances (or performances), then the authenticity of trans identities is problematized.

If gendered actions (Butler’s performativity) are “iteratively constituting gender identity” (Ton, 2018), or in other words, if identity is solely a construct, unstable and constantly reaffirmed through action, then the authenticity of trans identities is problematized.

I believe that all three of these three propositions can be successfully argued against, and that none are actually the case.

Quite often, performativity and social constructivism are presented as a binary opposite that is both superior and incompatible to essentialism. This particularly occurs within queer and feminist discourse (Bettcher, 2014). This is a failure of omission; namely, that social constructivists themselves have various and conflicting theories about whether there is a biological component to gender constructs (Alsop, Fitzsimmons and Lennon, 2002).

Practically speaking, this is akin to the ages-old “Nature v. Nurture” argument: whether certain behaviours or predispositions are innate, irrefutable, and genetically preprogrammed into an individual, or whether they are “learned” environmentally through social engagement and experience. And just like the behavioural argument, a common-sense answer should prevail here: gender is not only both socially constructed *and* innate, but it is both operating inextricably and influencing each other (Moore, 2013). There is no reason why an “essential identities” cannot still be evolving or shifting, not “static or reductionist but rather...embodied becomings.” (Rubin, 1998 p277).

Butler’s other claim is that queer identities can be subversive to sexist, heteronormative behaviours (Bettcher, 2014). She uses trans people and drag culture as examples of the performativity of gender and the transgression of those constructs (Ton, 2018), but in so doing, fails to acknowledge any autobiographical authority over trans narratives. The trans person in question might not share the goal of subversion or deconstruction of gender norms:

Somehow it has become our responsibility alone as transsexuals to shatter these norms. Somehow these critics that because we “know the rules” we should be the vanguard in charge of breaking them. It disappoints them that we have not made this connection between our knowledge and their program.

(Rubin, 1998, p273).

Butler seeks to address these criticisms in her later writing, *Undoing Gender* (2004), herself influenced by upswing of trans political activism in the meantime (Bettcher, 2014, 5.4), allowing for the possibility of stable gender

identities, and a more nuanced and distinct consideration of the trans experience (Butler, 2004, p43). The further consideration of the elements of trans experience is continued in Chapter 2.

And in order to properly locate knowledge within lived experience, the writing of Mark Johnson is introduced in Chapter Three. I discuss the theory of Embodied Cognition to contend against the constructivist idea that “language is the core of knowledge” (Marecek, Crawford & Popp, 2004), because “any philosophy based on such an impoverished view of meaning is going to over-intellectualize many aspects of human meaning-making and thinking” (Johnson, 2007 p8).

Gender performativity is possibly a rabbit hole that could be followed *ad infinitum*, but hopefully by addressing at least these three possible points of contention I have staked out an area in which trans experiences can be explored, and an orientation can be established from which to apprehend the creative practice.

Chapter 2: Postmedia Narratives and Trans [In]Visibility

This media experience has become the norm for all aesthetic experience. Hence in art there is no longer any painting outside and beyond the media experience. There is no longer any sculpture outside and beyond the media experience. There is no longer any photography outside and beyond the media experience.

– Peter Weibel¹⁴

The top ten websites of 2019, based on traffic, are all platform or service sites, not content producers. Not surprisingly, the top three are Google, YouTube and Facebook (Collins, 2019). Using Google, you can find virtually all well-known, and thousands more little-known, paintings and sculptures, in countless formats or reworked “memes.” On YouTube or Facebook, CNN or McDonald’s can publish a video, image or post... but so can an impoverished, unknown artist. The point that both are possible is important to the concept of the *postmedia*

¹⁴ Peter Weibel, *The Post-media Condition*, in AAVV, *Postmedia Condition*, cat., Centro Cultural Conde Duque, Madrid 2006 p.98 ; referenced by Domenico Quaranta in *Media, New Media, Postmedia* (Quaranta, 2010). Translated by Rhizome (Quaranta, 2011).

condition: virtually nothing exists (or can continue to exist, once focus is applied) outside the reach of the digital milieu and its re-generative nature; secondly, that the ubiquity of technology flattens financial barriers and democratizes access to publication or transmission (Guattari, 1990).

This is *not* an exhaustive history or examination of postmedia art theory, any more than the previous chapter is the entire history of the trans rights movement, but rather a brief review of one of the situating concepts and components of a contextual background from which to apprehend the creative practice.

Although the term and concept of postmediality was coined by Félix Guattari decades ago (1990), in regards to the future he saw for the use of already-ubiquitous electronic mass media and the burgeoning worldwide computer network, it has been argued that it was actually influenced by the availability of free technologies and media that had disseminated even earlier on from a set of elite users to the general public (Apprich et al, 2013). Although this particular proliferation and appropriation of electronic media had been going on since the 70's, the term seems to have been lying in wait, forecasting a perfect storm of physical technology and available software, an explosive period such as this past decade:

The junction of television, telematics and informatics is taking place before our eyes, and will be completed within the decade to come. The digitisation of the television image will soon reach the point where the television screen is at the same time that of the computer and telematics [telecommunications + Information

Systems] receiver. Practices that are separated today will find their articulation. (Guattari, 1990)

It is also interesting - particularly for this research - that Guattari saw this technology as a bridge to connect and thus empower groups and individuals that would be “different yet connected” (ibid). To him, digital networks (like social media) would offer greater expression, cooperation and ‘multiform’ possibilities, a much more dynamic situation than the idea of a passive consumer of media (Holmes, 2013 p.111).

Such an emphasis on mass media might seem disparate to the concept of “fine art,” but that is precisely the implication of a postmedia landscape... it perhaps helps to think of it as “post-mass-media.” A saturation point when everyone has access to the same mass media tools as corporations and the state.

Despite a heavy reliance upon the development of the internet, “New Media Art” wasn’t considered new technologically, but conceptually (Smite & Smits, 2013 p. 146). Whereas New Media Art proclaimed that “The Medium IS The Message,” postmedia artists are operating from within an environment where all media are equitable, where every facet and field of a lived experience is a potential tool for meaning-making and art production.

So we therefore have to mention historically hegemonic publishing platforms in a discourse of contemporary art practices, because advertising companies, news organisations, state agencies, and contemporary art practitioners all have access to the same media; it is by the nature of the *content and intent* that we discriminate (Quaranta, 2011).

New technologies are nothing other than new means to an end. Alone they are of [no] significance; it always depends upon how they are applied. I am against naïve faith in progress, glorification of the possibilities of technological developments. Much of what today's artists produce with New Media is very boring. But I am just as opposed to the denunciation of technology. For me technology in itself is not a category according to which I judge works. This type of categorization is just as outmoded as division in classical art genres (painting, sculpture...). I am interested in the idea of a project; ideally the means of realizing the project should arise from the idea itself.

- Catherine David (documenta12.de, 1997)

New technologies are almost always by nature disruptive, especially to entrenched financial interests- which is why both traditional media broadcasters [e.g. television corporations, radio stations] and art communities alike were originally dismissive of the potentiality of online publication. The adoption of digital technologies by artists confounded established compartmentalization based on medium, as well as methods of exhibition and basis for pricing (Manovich, 2001). The nigh-unstoppable and imminent reality of how much revenue curators and collectors [and corporate media] stood to lose was too terrifying to consider.

For a generation of artists who have been raised using computers, there is little difference between exhibiting work on a website or exhibiting work in a gallery; they are "digital natives" (ibid). If a computer is a "medium of thought" to be learned like a language, then it is their "mother tongue" (Lerman, Mohun &

Oldenziel, 2003 p.181). In a postmedia era, there is also little significance in distinguishing between traditional, chemical-based photography and a digitally created image, or between an 8mm video and a flash animation: the narrative is what is important, by whatever various and multiple means most available or appropriate (and to paraphrase the quote at the beginning of the chapter: it's all going to end up online anyways).

There are a few other distinguishing characteristics of this new milieu: multiplicity, manipulation, reiteration, recombination of media, juxtaposition, repositioning, emerging art practices from emergent technologies and the recycling or re-orientation of redundant/obsolete technologies (monoskop.org, 2016).

The realization of Guattari's vision of an impending era in which minority groups and individuals are able to wrestle access to mass media from the powers-that-be depends in part upon the miniaturization – and consequent portability, or constant presence – of the subsequent technologies. Postmedia life [as well as posthumanism] relies on this: the resultant effects of Moore's Law (Kurzweil, 2005, pp56-84). Computer scientist and technologist Gordon Moore noted back in the mid-60s that he could double the number of transistors on circuit about every 18 months. This suggests an exponential growth (*not* linear) in computing power inch for inch¹⁵. As this is a projection of growth (or miniaturization, to be more accurate) of the some of the most primary, fundamental components of digital technology, this acceleration then goes on to

¹⁵ The staggering difference between linear and exponential is an easy yet dangerous distinction to overlook, because humans are wired to conceptualize growth as linear, a straight line on a graph- 1,2,3,4,5... (Kurzweil,1999). Exponential growth, on the other hand, starts out looking very similar, but within just a few iterations explodes upwards in a curved trajectory on that same graph: 1,2,4,8,16,32,64,128,256... if those numbers seem vaguely familiar, it's probably because over the past decade, you've likely traded-up a USB memory stick, phone or laptop for one with increased memory or capacity... and that's Moore's Law in effect.

affect the price or size of every device that is built up from those components (ibid, p. 56); additionally, the added computational power creates new opportunities for software or devices that might not have been feasible even a few years prior. It is impossible to overstress the importance and dramatic, let us say existential, impact that this observed phenomenon and its ripple effects have had on modern life.¹⁶

Technology *everywhere* means the development of new [immediate] cultural production, new information, and even new jobs. For example, realizing that existing video games are attractive to trans players because they can play as a character that confirms their gender identity, new games have been developed where the player navigates the virtual world as a trans person (Veritas, 2016). Besides games there are also life-changing apps that offer anything from trans services according to area code, or a map of nearby unisex bathrooms; these have been created from trans people working in, and challenging, the traditionally-gendered field of IT work. As stated by author Kortney Ryan Zeigler, “Transgender people are making incredible waves in tech because of their presence and work that disrupts gender binaries... This will provide a new set of tools, skill sets, and perspectives on gender that both the tech industry and the world needs.” (Ziegler, 2013)

¹⁶ The final thing to note about Moore’s Law is that every couple of years, “industry professionals” declare that it is dying or dead. A Google search of “Moore’s Law is Dead” turns up results for practically every year this past decade (Tibken, 2019; Heath, 2018; Hruska, 2017; Bright, 2016; Blanco, 2015...). The headlines are hilariously similar in their certainty (the 2019 and 2017 headlines are almost identical: “Moore’s Law is dead, says Nvidia’s CEO” in 2019, versus 2017’s “Nvidia’s CEO Declare’s Moore’s Law Dead.”). But this focuses on the forest instead of the trees, so to speak; “the pros” like to argue the physical [literally, the physics of] limitations down to the size of the atoms of the materials used versus the size of an electron, etc., *ad nauseum*. But this bluster about proving who is correct totally overlooks the *effect* such a paradigm has on society, as well as the larger encompassing trend... Call it by any other name, but Moore’s Law regarding transistors was the *fifth* technology paradigm that followed such an exponential curve (Kurzweil, 2005 pp66-67), each one possible because of, and building upon the predecessor, and it will in turn lead to the sixth.

Audio-Visual Narratives

How should audiovisual narratives be defined in a post-media environment? It is not as easy as making a list of “accepted” formats- mainly because new technologies, new iterations, and new ways of engaging or repurposing existing [especially redundant] technologies is an integral element of a postmedial culture, as has already been stated. So it is not appropriate to simply declare, “videoed performances and documentaries, vlogs, film, and live performance.” Not only would such a list *never* be complete and never *not-need* updating, but as such a list would be media-centric [like a lot of traditional media] rather than message-driven, the very nature of its existence would be contradictory to the explanation it would be trying to provide. Rather, it is far better and useful to identify the *attributes* of a postmedia audiovisual narrative.

Postmedia narratives have an inherent capacity to be sequential, serial, successive storytelling (Deshane, 2014). The interpretation of that narrative, that message, the set of image-signs, also quite often relies upon understanding or recognition of simultaneous multiple contexts (Kinsey, 2013 p.75). Personal exposure -visibility- to a great extent is by choice; the personal identity may or may not be the same as the digital identity or public persona, and there is the opportunity for mutability, and additionally for multiplicity- of personae as well as of editions of work. The same still image, video or audio file might be adapted, reiterated and reissued for a variety of publications or platforms: a photo might exist as a limited edition of prints, as well as a digital file; a video

may exist in a museum collection while also being available online; an audio performance might exist on CD or vinyl record, as well as several online streaming services. On the other hand, it is also possible that both the identity and the work are temporary and not intended to be documented in a permanent fashion- and the identity may very well be the narrative [or work of art] in and of itself.

Every single time I step outside, my body is a public object.

-Mark Aguhar¹⁷

It could just as easily be argued that every time we step “inside” the internet, our bodies [identities] are public objects. Aguhar is actually referring to the constant visibility of a nonconforming trans body, but for many trans narratives, the body [especially over time] *is* the location of the art action, and the action is transformation.

The development of a character in a video game might also be considered a similar sort of narrative, not just in what we might tempted to offhandedly refer to as “real life,” like a performed character onstage or in online videos or live feeds. For example, Micha Cárdenas, trans artist and lecturer, developed and maintained a “Second Life” character as a work of art for a period of 365 hours (Bornstein & Bergman edit, 2010).

To reiterate, audiovisual narratives in a postmedia context notably have a capacity for serial production; they allow the producer to choose the degree of personal visibility or invisibility; they can be produced in multiple and mutable

¹⁷ From *Blogging for Brown Gurls*, quoted in *Trap Door* (Pérez, 2015 p.281)

editions, and one individual can produce and publish under multiple identities. Also, it should be noted that because of their other attributes, audiovisual narratives in a postmedia culture can eradicate, or at least problematize, the gendering of technology and social roles.¹⁸ The postmedia [or postdigital] “strives to characterize new economic, social and cultural contexts that have been introduced in the last decade due to the general evolution of computational technologies” (Contreras-Koterbay and Mirocha , 2016 p39).

These particular attributes of cultural production in a postmedia environment are exactly the reason why the movement for trans awareness and rights has exploded into the social dialogue at a speed several factors greater than any previous civil rights issue. The ability to fairly easily hide one’s “real life” identity while creating an “ideal” or desired version of the self online; to then be able to access a global network of information and peers, sharing stories, warnings and advice... for a demographic that has survived largely by staying invisible, isolation and the feeling of otherness is greatly alleviated by online access. Just as any “regular” cisgender person might breathe a sigh of relief when they are able to access an online medical site and find out the issue they are worried about is common and banal, in the same way a trans person- especially trans youth- can feel normalized and experience a sense of belonging. When people feel the strength in numbers, and that they have a legitimate place in society, it becomes easier to be more vocal about threats to inclusion or safety- even if it is done anonymously through a representative body like the

¹⁸ Although different fields or jobs may still largely be viewed as dominated by one gender or another- computer coders and game developers are typically assumed to be male, for example- those industry stereotypes are a result of who pursues [or is allowed to pursue] acquisition of the related skills. (Lerman, Oldenziel & Mohun eds, 2003 p.124) By contrast, the digital identity of YouTube, Facebook, Wordpress or Soundcloud is just as likely to be male, female or nonbinary, which may or may not correlate with the social portrayal of the producer “in real life.”

Transgender Law Center or Transgender Europe.¹⁹ This sort of online participation, whether it is information-seeking or membership, also allows a marginally better estimate of the actual size of the notoriously invisible trans demographic.

Furthermore, seeing trans identities on sites like Facebook or YouTube (regardless of whatever negative or bigoted responses and comments are present), whether or not they are anonymous or “alter-egos,” increases the visibility of trans identities in public domains, and hence normalizes their presence (Horak, 2014). The sheer volume of “trans vlogs” –whether they document time-lapsed physiological or emotional changes, or perhaps offer sequential tutorials on skillsets for newly transitioning people- is often overlooked by scholastic research on new media like YouTube (Carter, Getsy & Salah edit, 2014 p.573).

In much the same way, the addition of gay characters in traditional media (movies and TV shows) normalized gay inclusivity in the cultural mainstream- albeit at a much slower rate.²⁰ This should not be surprising, when you consider that twenty years ago, a TV show only had the attention of a viewer for an hour or so a week; with new media on-demand in a person’s pocket or purse, there is a much greater opportunity to influence public opinion, however overtly or subtly.

¹⁹Transgenderlawcenter.org is based in the US, and tgeu.org in the EU.

²⁰ The element that the gay and trans awareness movements shared in their portrayal in traditional media and entertainment, however, is that both groups followed a similar trajectory of being represented by a character who is either the butt of jokes or whose identity is itself the punchline or comedic relief, or that they are the “deviant” antagonist in the story; only slowly did gay characters become equalized as protagonists, to the point where it would seem socially unacceptable for a movie or TV show to make fun of a gay character just for being gay; it is still all too acceptable to use trans characters as the butt of jokes in entertainment, be that TV shows, movies or standup comedy routines.

The very important distinction, however, is the shift in ownership of the narrative- in traditional media, trans characters are objectified as mere plot contrivances by predominantly cisgender producers, who assume they are writing for a cisgender audience who will also recognize the trans character as “other” (Keegan, 2016). Similarly, as Judith Butler noted, descriptions of lesbians from the mainstream culture say more about heterosexual fears and fantasies than they do about the “lesbian experience itself” (Butler, 1990 p. 87).

In postmedia narratives, trans people have the authority- the authorship- to treat themselves as the subjects, and can assume a trans or trans-allied audience (Horak, 2014 p576.). This is especially true of aforementioned YouTube vlogs, but examples with larger scope or audience reach can be found on emergent media platforms challenging the entertainment production of cable and broadcast media: Punk rock musician Laura Jane Grace’s *True Trans* documentary series produced by AOL, or *Transparent* on Amazon by author and trans consultant Jill Soloway and singer/performer Our Lady J.

This explains how and why the very nature of a postmedia environment acted like rocket fuel for the groundwork slowly and laboriously laid by preceding generations of trans activists (as a final example, we could also look to the US and compare the timeframe of the fight for anti-discrimination gay rights versus the relatively rapid victory of the marriage equality movement, the latter of which was mostly fought in a similar online forum as the trans movement). However, there is still a question that remains- namely, why has that same environment encouraged such an exponential increase in cultural production by trans identities? There has been the “trans autobiography” as a book niche for some time, but not on a scale anywhere near today’s multimedia narratives. Yes,

this is partially answered by the previously mentioned ubiquity and accessibility of media and publishing platforms -there is a profundity and excess of output just in general, across *all* demographics. However, it can be argued that there is still yet another fundamental reason that is particular to trans* cultural production: These properties of postmediality are *inherently transgender themselves*- or to state it another way, these characteristics are integral to both postmedial and transgender existence.

Although clearly every trans person's experience is unique and they deserve "the agency of creating their own narratives" (Baldino, 2015, p.162), generally speaking the very concept of being *transgender* is *transgressive* of traditionally accepted, western social gender norms: trans people frequently have multiple [real or online] identities, or a digital identity that is contrary to their currently lived role in a social binary; hence, there is often a comfortability or at least a familiarity with slipping in between visibility and invisibility; and perhaps closest on point, their experienced gender can be mutable, dynamic, undefined or ambiguous, and like serial narratives, can also be *successive* (Getsy, 2015a).

Obviously, given the nigh-infinite amount of content online, the majority of the cisgender population has had no problem embracing and using these features to maximum results as well; however, whereas they have perhaps had to adapt and adjust to the ambiguity, confusion, and nonbinary nature of engagement or transaction within a postmedia environment, these are frequently *innate and fundamental orientations* of a trans identity. Such being the case, if postmediality is structurally transgender, then it becomes clear that trans identities have not become part of contemporary culture; rather, *contemporary culture has become transgender*. In either or both situations,

though- whether the trans community is growing as a demographic responsible for cultural production, or if in fact postmedia culture is transcending gender- it would then be valuable to understand the experiences of trans identities as relevant components of contemporary culture, and the orientation and interpretation of phenomena from such an embodied perspective.

A trans media object would cultivate trans consciousness by offering an aesthetic space in which the subject might feel a way forward through the closed phenomenological horizon of binary gender. –Cael Keegan (Keegan, 2016, p.27)

The postmedia emphasis of “Message Over Medium” parallels the trans desire for identity to transcend (or transgress) the delineations of the body. This may seem at odds with the concept of embodied cognition and the importance of the body to perspective, which is explored in the next chapter; but the cognitive dissonance and disruption of binary states that allows both truths to be held simultaneously are some of the very elements that inform the further development of a trans phenomenology in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Embodied Cognition and Trans* Phenomenology

Metaphor is conceptual, and it is based on experiential correlations between the movement of a person over a landscape and the passing of time. The metaphor is not merely a linguistic entity- a collection of words only [...] We need, first, to appreciate the pervasiveness of embodied meaning-making at the corporeal levels of our experience. We must see how our bodies, our brains, and our environments together generate a vastly meaningful milieu out of which all significance emerges for creatures with bodies like ours.

-Mark Johnson (2007)

In the previous chapter, I discussed how many of what could be considered “innate qualities” of generic trans experience are also evident characteristics in the greater postmedia culture. The argument was taken to the (indubitably contentious) conclusion that postmedia experience is, essentially, transgender. But even if it is at least maintained that trans and postmedia experiences share many similar features, then any desire or action to

understand our postmedia socio-cultural environment should include investigation into the experience of trans identities, especially when considered as a demographic contributing an increasing level of cultural production (Horak, 2014; Tang, 2017).

Before considering the experiences of a *trans* identity, I want to first consider how a consensus of related sciences and fields defines what *identity* is. What are the constituent parts to cognition or meaning-making; *how* do we think about our selves; and how do events shape us, and vice versa- how does “who we are” affect or shape how we perceive events, if “the body as it exists for oneself is the point of reference by which the whole world unfolds” (Rubin, 1998, p269). This leads into a review of the concept of “embodied cognition,” and several of the more important texts that defend it- most notably, Mark Johnson’s 2007 text, *The Meaning of the Body*. Through this enquiry, the importance and influence embodied cognition has, as a working theory, to the development of phenomenology as a philosophical tool for analysis by the likes of Husserl and Heidegger is exposed.²¹ The historical relevance of embodied cognition to the origins of various iterations of phenomenology (as the predicate for Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*) then illustrates how a Transgender Phenomenology could be even more relevant or applicable, coming from an embodied (rather than mostly social) capacity for problematizing cultural phenomena.

²¹ Welton, 2000; Heidegger, 1962; iotd.com, 2004.

Embodied Cognition and Mark Johnson's The Meaning of the Body

The postmodern position is that meaning is arbitrary, that it can be deconstructed and considered as a phenomenon independently from the thinker, that language is the root of knowledge (Marecek, Crawford & Popp, 2004), words are units of thought that exist in and of themselves, or as some existent representation in the mind, that can be cut up and rearranged (Johnson, 2007). In this modality of thinking, postmodern philosophy and linguistic philosophers (not to mention pop culture) are still tenuously grasping to a modernist understanding of identity- namely, a sort of "dualist," separate and distinct existence of the mind, and the body it inhabits. However, this has been massively, overwhelmingly refuted by a multitude of scientific disciplines (Johnson, 2007 p1). This research and creative practice embrace the argument put forth by Johnson that all meaning -and therefore artmaking- derives from engagement with the world as experienced from a particular body- that the act of cognition doesn't come from some "pure reason," but is *embodied*, the mind shaped by the organism it is nested within and the body nested within its environment. In the first part of this chapter, the various positions laid out by Johnson, a philosopher and professor at the University of Oregon. His numerous publications are reviewed, and an attempt made to illustrate and defend the plausibility and logic of the theory of embodied cognition- essentially, that meaning exists prior to words (ibid). This is important to the following review of Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* and central to the idea of a workable trans* phenomenology.

Already in 2007, embodied cognition as a theory was widely accepted and fairly well established in a plethora of scientific fields and communities

(Johnson, 2007, xi; Gallagher, 2005), albeit still hotly debated as to what it actually suggested in practice (Wilson & Golonka, 2013). One of the main premises of the theory is that such a social landscape is a fundamental component to what might be referred to as “Mind” (which for these purposes will be considered synonymous to “identity”). Refuting Descartes’ Cartesian Duality, embodied cognition proposes that all meaning- thought, emotion, abstract reasoning- originates from a body operating and engaging within a physical and social environment.²² A sense of self, the ways of thinking and feeling, are fundamentally reliant upon the basic form of the body (Gallagher, 2005), with its constituent parts of brain and sensory organs, and how that body engages and navigates through its physical and social environment. All of these are vital components to what might be referred to as the “transcendent” features of consciousness or cognition- i.e., meaning-making (Johnson, 2007 p. 35-45). Make a serious change to one of these elements and it changes that sense of “I-ness.” This idea- that “mind” and its operations are dependent and spread out across a matrix of internal and external [subjective and objective] as well as personal and social [singular and plural] is also referred to as an Integral Theory of Consciousness (Wilber, 1996).

Mark Johnson’s book of the same year, one in the long line of a seminal body of research, *The Meaning of the Body*, still feels groundbreaking even today, mostly because our bodies make it so easy to trick ourselves into thinking that

²² Descartes proposed the existence of pure reason, structures... we like the idea of a pure mind floating independently of a body; we locate “The Mind” as sitting in some mythical place within our brain, with thoughts developing out of ether. “Pure Mind” and reason are thought to be “above” the dirty base nature of the Body. The nature of our bodies practically encourages this; the sensory organs hide in the background so the focus is on the object being perceived (Johnson, 2007). But this simply isn’t the case. The way we perceive -apprehend- the events and objects around us depend not just on the nature of our brains, and the shape and constitution of our bodies, but even the environment and our orientation towards to those things, both physically and metaphorically.

our “mind” is an independent thing, acting autonomously; it’s impossible to “see behind the curtain” as it were; the mechanisms of thought aren’t seen, just the output. Following are some of the main arguments and the evidence they provide.

Cognition is “The mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses” (OED). Basically then, it is thinking or meaning-making. This is not just linguistic, literary or logical thought, but also “subtler” actions like interpreting body movement, and empathy (Thompson, 2018). What Johnson and other proponents have argued is that all thought, all thinking, even the most abstract thoughts or concepts, are shaped and determined by the body within which they originate, which in turn is dependent upon the environment within which it operates. They are metaphors based upon the physical sensations and movements that our body experiences, which are how we make sense of and interpret the world, from infancy onwards (Johnson, 2007 p. 48). Most if not all of our metaphors are based on body movement or sensory experience, and that movement can be described by differences in *Tension, Linearity, Amplitude* and *Projection* (p.22 -24). These metaphors are ubiquitous to the point of invisibility in our everyday language (p. 179).

Affection is Warmth

Important is Big

More is Up / Less is Down

Organisation is a Physical Structure

Happy is Up / Sad is Down

States [of Being] are Locations

Causes are Forces

Causation is Forced Motion

Purposes are Destinations

Time is Motion

Control is Up

Knowing is Seeing

Help is Support

Difficulties are Burdens

Categories are Containers

The development of these metaphors are dependent on the universality of our way of experiencing the world via a human body and its sensory organs, as compared to, say, how a bat experiences and interprets the world.²³ For example, as a bipedal animal navigating primarily with unidirectional stereoscopic vision, a human typically walks forward, towards a destination. We can measure the time it takes for us to get there. Therefore, our experience of time is generally as moving forward; Time *marches on*; we wish we could *go back* in time. As for where we want to go, we *move ahead* with our plans, or they suffer a *setback*.²⁴

Even all of higher abstract reason, logic and math are dependent upon and determined by our bodily engagement and apprehension of our

²³ This is a very famous example set forth in a text by Thomas Nagel, "What is it Like to Be a Bat," in *The Philosophical Review*, 8(4). (Oct., 1974), pp. 435-450.

²⁴ During this research I have only recently come across literature describing the difference, but as an outlier or exception, it is easy to imagine that any person who from birth experiences a handicap to their sensory organs or mobility, experiences a different set of what Gallagher calls "body schema" (Gallagher, 2005, p24) even if they use the same culturally engrained metaphors (It should be noted as well that he makes a distinction between body schema and body image). This is specifically a paper that critiques one of the books reviewed in this chapter, Ahmed's 2006 *Queer Phenomenology*, and asks how it could be interpreted from a disabled viewpoint (Abrams, 2016).

environment. Thoughts and ideas -even math and numbers- do not exist independently from how we perceive. Additionally, there is no break between *that* sort of thinking and emotion (Johnson, 2007 p.176). In fact, logic is *dependent* upon emotion, according to Johnson. Therefore, cognition is not simply scientific and logic based thought; art and music-making are equally important forms of meaning-making to human beings.

Acknowledging that all meaning is generated from an embodied identity can have a powerful effect on how we view, engage and interpret art, on the processes of making it, and the human relationship that bridges the two actions. I can feel the powerful, sweeping arc of a brush stroke because it relates to a physical action; I respond to the increased tempo of a drumbeat because I *know*, pre-linguistically, the state of being I experience when my heart beat starts racing.

One of the greatest impediments to an appreciation of the full scope of embodied meaning is the way philosophers of language focus almost exclusively on language (i.e., spoken and written words and sentences) as the bearer of meaning. [...] aesthetics is not just art theory, but rather should be regarded broadly as the study of how humans make and experience meaning, because [...] the process of embodied meaning in the arts are the very same ones that make linguistic meaning possible.

(Johnson, 2007 p. 209)

When developing a work of art, whether it is spontaneous or planned, the artist doesn't need to be concerned with how people will describe it verbally, but

rather, with transmitting as expertly as possible the physical intention, with the understanding that the receiver is working from the same set of bodily metaphors, even if their personal experiences might differ wildly.

So, at its core, embodied cognition is the refutation that there is a separate “mind” that can pursue “pure reason” and operates independently of the body, no matter how prevalent a concept that might be in popular thinking. Going forward, when we are considering the methodological tool of phenomenology, it should become apparent that considering an embodied mind as the locus and origin of all meaning has an effect fundamentally different than the supposition of “free-floating” or independently existent concepts or structures.



fig. 6. Your Brain Hallucinates Your Conscious Reality. YouTube.

The Relevance of Embodied Cognition to Phenomenology

Phenomenological analysis builds upon differences in phenomena. The interplay of identity and difference displayed by appearances and their situated and perspectival composition calls for an account in which the one to whom the object appears is a basic factor in the description. (Welton, 2000 p. 15)

My turn to phenomenology comes from a need to theorize transsexual and transgender experience on its own terms. From this need, a whole new set of questions can be asked about bodies and subjectivity. (Rubin, 1998 p279)

Although it is mentioned or referenced as often in art departments as in any other field of academics or study, Phenomenology was developed and proposed by Edmund Husserl as a philosophical tool of analysis (Welton, 2000). Without expanding this into a full historical account, let it suffice to say that there are multiple branches and “types” of phenomenology, developed by both Husserl and countless philosophers that followed, including his student Heidegger, as well as Merleau-Ponty and Derrida. (Smith, 2013). Incidentally, perhaps somewhat confusing to the goal of this research is the existence of a branch labeled “Transcendental Phenomenology,” also shortened to “trans phenomenology,” developed by Husserl himself and argued against by Heidegger and others (Welton, 2000). So from here on out, in this chapter and this research, when the development or use of “trans* phenomenology” is referenced, it is referring to *transgender* phenomenology, not Husserl’s, which some say argues for the existence of “ideal laws” and does not consider consciousness [cognition] as “part of the world,” which, it has been noted, it very much is (Moran, 2008; Tassone, 2017).

These multiple branches, along with the fact that phenomenology is, by nature, something that changes, makes it hard to give a permanent definition: “There is no unique and definitive definition of phenomenology. It is rather a

method and an experience always open and always renewing itself.” (Farina, 2014). However, generally speaking, Phenomenology encourages the description of a subjective perception, perception from the organs of a body, and therefore is dependent on the “lived experience.”

The phenomenological method may be fruitfully applied to the study of transsexuals and transsexualism because of its willingness to theorize the material body and bodily consciousness, its ability to grasp the function of essences for some trans subjects, its sense of circumscribed agency, and its descriptive goals, which counter the relentless discourse-driven criticisms of transsexual subjects. Most of all, phenomenology remains committed to lived experience as one legitimate source of knowledge. (Rubin, 1998 p 272)

As phenomenology crept into other fields as a subjective method of analysis, it did raise criticism that is relevant to this research, particularly within feminist theory circles (Connor, 2018a) and, in turn, from within Queer Theory that developed within feminist studies. Most of these arguments center on the original hetero-masculine-bodied perspective of earlier writings; whether these are specious arguments given the fact that phenomenological reporting is inherently subjective (and so writing from a male would come from a male perspective) can be argued elsewhere; for the purposes of this research, it is worth noting that the arguments and criticisms in turn were the catalyst for a feminist and queer body of writing on the topic, hoping to dismantle western dualism (Apprich, Slater, Iles & Schultz, eds, 2013 p. 69). Judith Butler herself

criticized the entrenched mind-body binary, which is antithetical to, and disproven by the concept of embodied cognition, yet it is such an entrenched Cartesian worldview that it still seems to creep uninvited into even dualism-critical feminist texts (Butler, 1990 p.12).

Queer Theory actually developed out of women's studies in the 90's, and is concerned with studying ideas of natural/unnatural, or normal/deviant sexual behaviour and gender performance (Kemp, 2009). As a field of study it has been applied to, or influenced, virtually any and every part of contemporary life that has been critically studied, even HR and IR²⁵:

Queer theory emphasises the fluid and humanly performed nature of sexuality – or better, sexualities. It questions socially established norms and dualistic categories with a special focus on challenging sexual (heterosexual/homosexual), gender (male/female), class (rich/poor), racial (white/non-white) classifications. It goes beyond these so-called 'binaries' to contest general political (private/public) as well as international binary orders (democratic/ authoritarian). (Thiel, 2018)

Given such history, in which the notion of "Queer" questions norms, and Queer Theory "focuses on the constructedness of gendered and sexual identities and categorizations" (Callis, 2009 p.215), Queer Phenomenology is then ostensibly a philosophical framework through which to question normalized readings, interpretations and understandings of gendered experiences.

²⁵ HR and IR = Humans Resources and International Relations

Or perhaps it can be said, as Sara Ahmed does in her 2006 book, *Queer Phenomenology*, that it is a questioning of normalized “orientations.” In the three chapters and following conclusion, Ahmed plays with multiple meanings and iterations of the verb “to orient”- Orientations Towards Objects, Sexual Orientation, The Orient and Other Others, and Disorientation and Queer Objects. In her introduction, Ahmed, who is a professor at Goldsmith’s College at University of London, states:

I start here because phenomenology makes ‘orientation’ central in the very argument that consciousness is always directed ‘toward’ an object, and given its emphasis on the lived experience of inhabiting a body... Orientations shape not only how we inhabit a space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation, as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we direct our energy and attention toward. A queer phenomenology, perhaps, might start by redirecting our attention toward different objects, those that are ‘less proximate’ or even those that deviate or are deviant.

(Ahmed, 2006, pp. 2-3)

As the eponymous text on queer phenomenology, Ahmed’s book is widely considered both successful and important (Howard, 2007; McDowell, 2009). As I mentioned previously that there are several, contradicting branches or schools of phenomenology, I have to note that she continues to reference Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger interchangeably, without mentioning the rather significant differences between them (however, this could be an intentional “queering” of the body and history of phenomenology). Nor does she make

mention of embodied cognition, which seems to me to be a strange omission. At the very least, I find it strange because of the social aspect of identity and cognition, and the desire to “queer” or problematize orientation and perception within or towards society.

Disregarding any critiques of the style and flow of the writing, there is some wording that, in current culture, could be considered to be problematic, although this might be attributable to the age of the book. Ahmed describes on more than one occasion the act of “becoming” a lesbian (Ahmed, 2006 pp.19-20). In the specific context of those paragraphs, it seems that she is perpetuating a narrative that sexual orientation is a choice. However, writer and art historian David Getsy’s 2015 book, *Abstract Bodies*, offers a different way of reading and interpreting those passages, suggesting that identities can be *successive*. (Getsy, 2015a p39). His text provides an incentive for this research to push past a *queer* phenomenology, into one that acknowledges and acts from a fully embracing position of embodied cognition, and focused not only on social aspects like sexuality (ibid), but also a physiological engagement with the environment of which the body is inextricably a part- the lived experience of a trans identity.

Transformation was the norm in American sculpture of the 1960s. The decade saw thoroughgoing attacks on sculptural representation and on the very idea of the statue. In the wake of sculpture’s reconfiguration, modes such as assemblage, the reductive object, and earthworks proliferated. [...] The 1960s in America also saw a fundamental shift in the ways that persons were understood. This was the decade in which gender identities

and their distinction from biological sex began to be more publically contested. – David Getsy (Getsy, 2015a, xi)

David Getsy is not transgender. The artists from the 60's that he reviews in *Abstract Bodies* are, by design of his own selection, not transgender. However, he takes the opportunity of writing his 2015 book to revisit works by the selected artists through a contemporary lens of a transgender critique, to see how the social milieu of that time might have encouraged the abstract movement in sculptural art. (p35). He notes how, even as the figurative and literal representation was removed from sculpture, we still manage to attribute human characteristics and qualities to the works, including gender (ibid). He states that they accomplished this through use of “metaphors of the human body and of personhood,” but curiously, like Ahmed, he too never mentions why or how this is possible: that because of the embodied nature of cognition, we are wired to recognize the patterns of human form and face (Johnson, 2007, p37). A cat, for example, does not see the face of Jesus in the burnt surface of toast.²⁶

What Getsy does *exceptionally* well, however, is illustrate how a transgender analysis can be applied –and should be applied- to seemingly unrelated issues and phenomena; that a simplistic binary model is ripe for deconstruction, and that “transgender capacity erupts at those moments when such reductive norms do not hold” (Getsy, 2015a p34). About this “capacity,” he writes:

The most important feature of transgender capacity is that it can be an unintended effect of many divergent decisions and

²⁶ An occurrence known as *pareidolia*. And it seems to happen a LOT with Jesus (Knutson, 2013).

conditions. That is, a transgender critique can be demanded of a wide range of texts, sites, systems and objects- including those that, at first, seem unrelated to transgender concerns and potentialities. (p. 35)

Transgender capacity does not derive from sexuality. Rather, the categorical disruption caused by queer or polyamorous sexualities produces a need to account for gender's already existing multiplicity and potentiality. (p.38)

At various points, when describing the capacity or defining features of transgender identities, among other attributes Getsy mentions several times the idea of *successive* genders or sexualities, and this notion- of being one thing, and then being another, and then having the capacity to be yet another- offers and encourages a rethinking of Ahmed's otherwise potentially awkward description of "becoming" a lesbian.

During the case studies in Part II, some of his other writing is referenced as well. For now though, it is sufficient just to note that in *Abstract Bodies*, Getsy presents historically exhaustive case studies of four artists from the aforementioned decade. For the purposes of this thesis, *which* artists are irrelevant, save for the fact they are intentionally *not* transgender themselves, yet their work problematized and questioned notions of gender and sexuality through abstract form.

"Queer" questions norms, and queer phenomenology is a philosophical orientation from which to question normalized readings, interpretations or

experiences. However, all of this is situated largely within the social interaction and engagement in sexuality and sexual orientations. So, regarding the further development and application of a trans* phenomenology, what happens if the questioning and analysis shifts from a “social queering” to a more intrinsic, internal, or at least *different* locus- namely, a problematized relationship between the mind and the physical body, rather than the social environment.²⁷ If queer phenomenology questions the “normalness” or “deviancy” of heteronormative and homosexual behaviours in society, and deconstructs *social* binaries, then can the “orientation” be shifted or pivoted, and question the point of view of the binaried, cisgender body? How body image versus body schema can differ, or how body image might change or challenge the phenomenological, descriptive approach? For although embodied experiences (cognition) are typically described as resulting from the relevant body *schema*, or the physiological layout, makeup or sensory-motor roadmaps of a body and its (moving) position in space (Gallagher, 2005), it is indeed possible that a situation of extreme body dysmorphia, a disjointed feeling, a dissonance between the attitude towards, perception and expectation of the body -body *image*- could have a similarly profound effect on perception and experience (Johnson, 2007). The author Jay Prosser proposes just as much when he suggests (Prosser, 1998) that the dysmorphia between what some trans people feel their body *ought* to be, and its *actual* composition, is akin to the condition

²⁷ Both Ahmed’s Queer Phenomenology and Getsy’s application of Transgender Studies fail to [at least overtly] acknowledge the locus of both their enquiries, the embodiment of cognition. Getsy writes about body metaphors present in abstract art, and that it is through them that we are able to map gender (or any anthropomorphic quality) where objectively there is none, as abstract art demands of us (Getsy, 2007, xiii). However, the origin of those metaphors is not linguistic, but physiological, an origin and critical relationship he never really expounds upon. Similarly, despite her frequent references to “bodily orientation” and the use of movement metaphors, Ahmed never seems aware of, or at least interested in commenting upon, how they both sensibly come from the same place (Ahmed, 2006).

agnosia.²⁸ It unclear as to which concept (schema or image) that discrepancies between chromosomes and genitalia belong; the same sort of situation which, as Judith Butler argues, proves that “sex [gender], as a category that comprises a variety of elements, functions, and chromosomal and hormonal dimensions, no longer operates within the binary framework that we take for granted” (Butler, 1990 pp109-110).

Queer Phenomenology is important because it offers itself as a tool to answer those questions and problems raised by feminist and queer studies about constructed binaries, and as a method by which to continue to question and problematize hegemonic cultural discourse: *Why* are we interpreting this social object in this way, why is *this* the “normal” way, is it the *only* way, is there an *alternative* way, is there a *better* way?²⁹ Just as queer phenomenology can be used to explore or interpret social norms or objects from alternative positions, could a trans* phenomenology help problematize readings of static, unchanging, singular, binary bodies, physiologies and genders?³⁰ How might Gettsy’s and Ahmed’s impressive efforts be pushed further, to extend queer phenomenology

²⁸ Agnosia is actually a whole family of extremely different conditions, but all marked by the inability to process different types of sensory information. What Prosser is referring to is most likely *autotopagnosia*, which is the inability to orient parts of one’s body (Denes et al, 2000). I might also suggest Body Integrity Identity Disorder, or BIID, which is a dissociation with part of one’s own body, a feeling that it is not one’s own (biid.org). He also mentions Phantom Limb Syndrome (Prosser 1998, 84-85), which is the continued sensation in a limb that is no longer attached.

²⁹ To quote Frank Zappa, “Without deviation from the norm, Progress is not possible.”

³⁰From a physiological standpoint, and regarding the difference between body schema and body image previously mentioned, researchers in Barcelona determined that various parts of the brain of trans people were actually more similar to their identified gender than their prescribed sex (Russo, 2016). This perhaps goes a long way to explaining at least some of the body dysmorphia that many trans people face (which many cisgender people experience too, albeit for different reasons). This might then also suggest that there is indeed a schematic, physical difference in apprehending an object from a trans experience- where there is an actual difference between how the brain’s software interprets, versus how the body’s hardware engages. The dysphoria that many trans people report feeling, if accepted as a feature of this new phenomenology, could be used as an asset rather than a dysfunction: much like queer theory does, problematizing an issue helps identify blind spots, new opportunities, ways of thinking and engaging.

and transgender critique into a transgender phenomenological orientation, and would it be more than just a semantic exercise?

There are previous attempts and examples from which inspiration can be drawn; for example, by Cael Keegan (2016), N. F. Baldino (2015), and one of the earliest texts on the subject, by Henry S. Rubin (1998). Rubin's article, *Phenomenology as a Method in Trans Studies*, is concerned with challenging (collapsing) the perceived incompatible binaries of discursive analysis and phenomenology as contended, largely, by queer and feminist theories (Giffney & O'Rourke, 2016); and shifting agency, and legitimacy, to the trans subject of their own narrative:

[...] brazen critiques or appropriations of transsexual practices are a result of the rejection of (transsexual) subjectivity as a source of legitimate knowledge. In view of these tendencies for nontranssexuals to wrest away the terms through which we transsexuals define our lives, it seems particularly prudent to use a method that not only legitimates subjectively informed knowledge but also recognizes the significance of bodies for the lived experience of the I. [...] The body as it exists for oneself is the point of reference by which the whole world unfolds. (Rubin, 1998 p268).

Although the 2015 Baldino article surprisingly never acknowledges or cites Rubin's text, there is a similar importance put upon the reclamation of agency and authority over trans narratives from cisgender analysis, particularly from the medicalization and pathologization of trans identities. Rather than "being

forced to use cisgender terminology to define their own non-conforming experiences,” Baldino insists that “the transgender community must create their own method of narrative construction and analysis,” in order to create a “uniquely *positive* account of transgender identity by focusing on *individuals’* own descriptions of themselves, thereby reclaiming the trans narrative on trans terms” (Baldino, 2015 p162). As it is possibly just a semantic argument, I hesitate only to suggest an amendment to Baldino’s assertion that trans narratives must be “positive,” and instead proffer that they need to be “authentic.”

Most recently, Cael Keegan focuses on the narratives presented in moving images, questioning for whom and for what purpose the recent proliferation of trans subjects and images are presented; and from there, theorizes a shift in the dialogue, from trans images produced for popular [cisgender] reception, to creating “a trans point of media reception for the popular image” (Keegan, 2016 p26). This is exactly what David Getsy is insisting upon and doing by reviewing seemingly unrelated cultural material through a transgender orientation or perspective, suggesting that a transgender analysis might be appropriate/critical/necessary wherever “dimorphic and static understandings of gender are revealed as arbitrary and inadequate” (Getsy, 2015a p35).

The salient feature prevalent in these three propositions is the *primacy of agency in trans narrative*. They support the validity of subjective knowledge developed through lived experience, and challenge the cisgender framing of the legitimacy of affirmative trans existence and gender identity development (Burdge, 2013, pp52-54).

To review, if it is acknowledged as I did in Chapter 2 that the nature of

postmedia experience includes nonbinary and successive identities, multiplicity and malleability, then trans* phenomenology has the potential to be an extremely relevant and contemporary orientation from which to experience any cultural objects and events presented, and to update or question working models of what the mind-body-environment concept looks like.

There are some potential criticisms of trans* phenomenology. Most likely is the argument against essentialism perpetuated by feminist theory. Also, all trans experiences are different, so to try and codify them into an analytical tool might lose some authenticity or nuance of that individualism. However, if we accept and use “transgender” as an umbrella term, we have to understand that it may include “queer” identities, but not necessarily; and that some who identifies as queer might not necessarily identify as trans.

However, the arguments against these possible criticisms as laid out in these chapters are defensible and sound. Phenomenology is subjective reporting, as has already been stated, and so this is largely an exercise in offering a different way of perceiving, interpreting or creating meaning (or in other words, empathy). It is a dynamic and changing field that constantly adopts, tries and, possibly, rejects new approaches, which is ideal for the apprehension of possibly uncertain, subjectively interpreted results of creative practice-based research.

Although the point is specifically that non-trans cultural objects can be interpreted from a trans orientation (Keegan, 2016), the inventory of precedential arts practices following in this research affords an opportunity to first identify, as much possible, any recurring or generalized themes that might inform and further shape this developing trans* phenomenology, that could

offer an updated, relevant understanding of postmedia environment and experience.

Trans* Phenomenology can fundamentally remap the study human cultures. Their recognition of the mutable and multiple conditions of the apparatus we know as gender has wide-ranging consequences. That is, once gender is understood to be temporal, successive, or transformable, all accounts of human lives look different and more complex. It would be a mistake to limit this powerful epistemological shift clearly identifiable transgender topics and histories. While transgender subjects and experience must remain central and defining, the lessons of transgender critique demand to be applied expansively. (Getsy, 2015a p35)

Most importantly, based on the objectives of this research, such a particular orientation from which to analyze cultural objects can potentially offer a better understanding of the processes and results of the creative practice. Possibly, it can even provide a new methodology applicable during the artistic process to increase awareness and attention to the trans narrative, and orientation of the trans body, at every step during production.

In this chapter I have briefly discussed phenomenology and, more importantly, the theory of embodied cognition and how it contradicts constructivism; some of its key supporters and concepts, and how they can be

considered important not just to trans identities but art production in general. A review of previous treatises on trans* phenomenology has identified the importance of maintaining agency in trans narratives, “reclaiming the trans narrative on trans terms” (Baldino, 2015 p163).

In Chapter 2, I laid out the argument that a postmedia environment is essentially trans in nature- transgender, transcendent, transformative, transient. I identified *specific* characteristics to support this claim, that can now be considered alongside trans agency when engaging trans* phenomenology: [in]visibility, multiplicity (of identities as well as contexts), malleability and mutability, and a capacity to be sequential or successive.

Chapters 1 and 2 illustrated how trans people have historically been an invisible yet targeted demographic, but now, despite ongoing existential threats, are a viable and growing community responsible for cultural production. All of these results contribute to the successful development of a contextual framework in which to situate the following precedents of the creative practice in Part II, and an informed trans* phenomenology as a method for their analysis. Ultimately, this will result in a more robust, contextualized understanding of the creative practice as an authentic audiovisual narrative of trans lived experience.

Part II: State of the Art: Precedents of Practice

In Part I, a brief history and the current sociopolitical status of the general trans community were reviewed in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, the computational and cultural forces that contributed to, as well as the psychosocial results of, a postmedia environment were investigated; in addition, also addressed was the unique relationship and similarities between trans identities and postmedia narratives. In Chapter 3, the evidence and the support for the theory of embodied cognition were reviewed. Also, a lay description of the general field of Phenomenology was covered; how embodied cognition supports such subjective analysis, and how such a methodology can be beneficial to fields like Queer Theory or Trans Studies, by being modified into a new tool like Queer or Trans* Phenomenology.

Now in Chapters 4 and 5, that framework and subjective analytical tool are used, in addition to critical analysis, to review the precedents of postmedia trans artist practices and personal work, all of which have been selected to most accurately situate the creative practice that is the focus of this research.

As mentioned in the methodology, some parameters have been established in order to select the most relevant. Firstly, that they are currently practicing, or have been within the past decade, with a contemporary web

presence. Secondly, they need to be self-identified as trans during their production period. Thirdly, they need to be self-identified and producing work as multidisciplinary artist, rather than as a professional working within a specific medium [for example, a photographer or videographer].

Chapter 4: Postmedia Trans Practices

4.1 Mark Aguhar (1987 – 2012, Texas, USA)



fig. 7. Little Girl Type

When discussing whether the trans body needs to be obvious in an artwork in order to qualify it (Getsy, 2015b), Mark Aguhar’s practice is a good place to start: as much self-therapy as art practice, it is a political demand for visibility, for some sense of agency as a “convergence of their multiple identities”- an overweight, brown, trans queer person struggling in a white, cisgender hetero hegemony (Vallarta, 2018). Aguhar’s practice included video,

performance, painting and text, but what she was arguably best-known for was her Tumblr site, Call-Out Queen / BLOGGING FOR BROWN GURLS. She made updating and posting images to it an art practice in itself, and it in turn made her “online-famous.” From her artist statement still online, Aguhar defines her work as “a continuous exploration of queer expression and what it means to have grown up gay on the internet” (markaguhar.tumblr.com, 2012). Aguhar was challenging and pushing normative representations of beauty in popular culture- through her work, but also through her intentional existence. Her Tumblr site was described by a friend as a “black hole of beauty, rage and gender rebellion” (Drake, 2015).

I find the stark rawness in Aguhar’s autobiographical photos and drawings both intriguing and inspirational as goal in an art practice. That unflinching self-reflection is indicative of unfiltered reporting on her experience. Aguhar successfully used her body and its orientation to others to politicize her presence- “Her work harnessed close proximity and its interpersonal transmissions as the art itself” (Pérez, 2017 p.281).



fig. 8. Realness



fig. 9. Walk-Off

The nature of a Tumblr site as a narrative challenges notions of authorship, as many images are re-posts; curation becomes art. Artist becomes curator. Many images are then re-posted by others, further queering and confounding authorship, and therefore identity, and so by extension, gender.

Although Aguhar was pursuing an MFA, their drawings, watercolours and hand-lettered or stencilled signs have a decidedly “outsider” sense to them. Color, depth and scale are sacrificed, ignored or warped, in favour message-centric text; patterns and collage are used to decorate the bodies and the acts represented.

BEING IN BROWN QUEER SPACE MAKES ME FEEL SIMULTANEOUS JOY AND RAGE. JOY THAT I AM IN A SPACE WHERE I DON'T HAVE TO CHOOSE WHO I AM...RAGE THAT WHEN A WHITE PERSON APPROACHES ME THEY HAVE TO PREFACE OUR CONVERSATION WITH THEIR FETISHIZATION OF ASIANS, AND WHEN I LOOK AT THEM, I JUST SEE A HUMAN BEING. RAGE THAT I CAN FEEL THE DIFFERENCE ON A DAILY BASIS BETWEEN WHERE I CAN FEEL SAFE AND WHERE I CAN FEEL AT RISK. –Mark Aguhar³¹

By making her body central to her art, she invited her audience to center themselves according to her trans-femme brownness (p282). From my own trans-female orientation, “proximity” is an uneasy proposition; in proximity I do not immediately find potential for intimacy, but rather potential for subjection to the objectifying “Gaze,” potential for ridicule, potential for violence. If her physical closeness to her audience during some of her performances created an unfamiliar narrative for performance, if it created some sense of unease about

³¹ Mark Aguhar in 2011, (Peralta & Pérez, 2014)

how to read the event, for me it would be a successful reading of her work. The concept of social proximity or exposure is relevant to work that is reviewed in Part III.



fig. 10. #WHITEGIRLPROBLEMS (#NOTATHING)

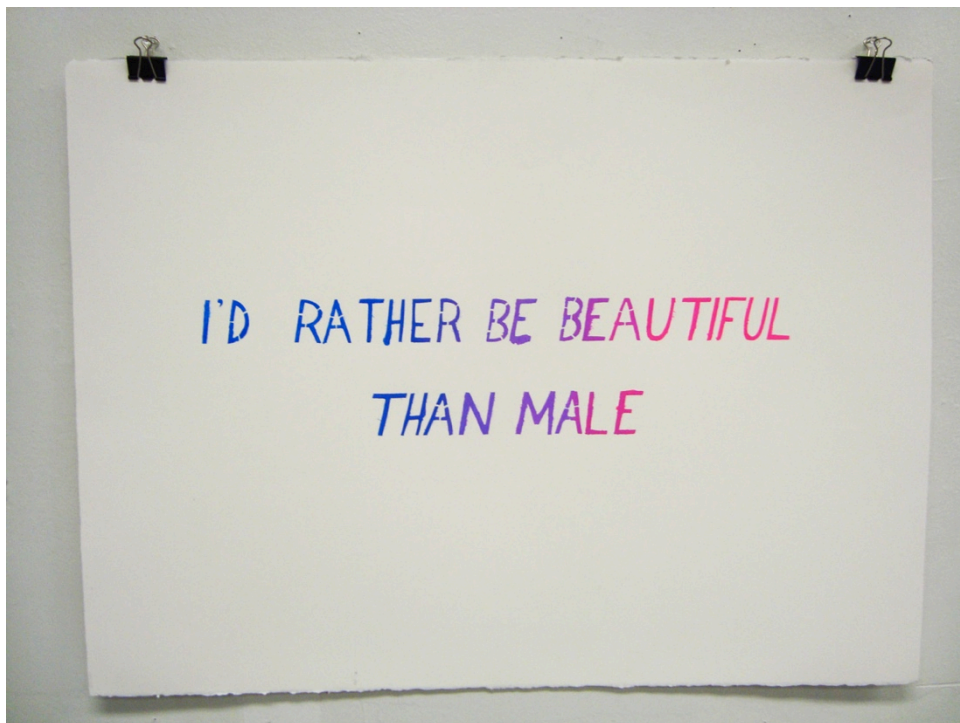


fig. 11. Making Looks

4.2 Justin Vivian Bond (1963, Maryland, USA)



fig. 12. Justin Vivian Bond

Justin Vivian Bond had chosen prefixes and pronouns that complicate and problematize generic gender descriptors, preferring to be referred to by “Mx” rather than “Ms.” or “Mr.,” and by “V” rather than “he” or “she.” Although by 2017 “V” had been replaced with They/Them, it’s still Mx Justin Vivian Bond, a name which itself is a political declaration of Trans identity (Baldino, 2015), refusing to alter or adapt to fit a binary, cis gender paradigm.

Bond is a self-described “American singer-songwriter, author, painter, performance artist, and actor” (Bond, 2018). Based on the output of Bond’s work, these are in order of importance; in fact, despite her receiving an MA at Central St. Martin’s, her Wiki page doesn’t even mention her visual art exhibitions, such as the ones at the New Museum in New York (newmuseum.org, 2017) and Vitrine Gallery in London (vitrinegallery.com, 2015). This focus on live performance is similar to Berlin-based artist Vaginal Davis, who has exhibited alongside Bond (vaginaldavis.com, 2018). However, unlike Davis, Bond has been included as a precedent of practice because of the multidisciplinary –or as Bond calls it, the “trans-genre” nature of both their performance as well as other pursuits (justinvivianbond.com, 2018). These include a very active YouTube presence, onstage and onscreen performances, gallery installations, painting, book and album publishing (Bond has even released a perfume).



fig. 13. Cherish



fig. 14. Justin Vivian Bond, "22nd Century." YouTube.

As part of "Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon," the 2017 exhibition at the New Museum, Bond presented watercolor drawings from a project entitled, "My Model / My Self."



fig. 15. My Barbie Coloring Book

Bond also performed in the front window display of the museum the night of the opening:

On the show's opening night in late September, Bond took their place in front of a backdrop of watercolors melding their faces with Graham's—the same wallpaper that papers Bond's living room installation inside the museum, a collaboration with the label Voutsas—surrounded by a red carpet with a velvet rope and a plant to evoke a "70's editorial vibe." Most importantly, though, for that performance and those to follow—tonight, on Halloween, and December 1, on World AIDS Day—Bond is wearing a pink dress by the same designer Graham often wore in her photos in the 70's and

80's: Frank Masandrea, a contemporary of Donna Karan and Carolina Herrera who has long been forgotten since he died of AIDS in the late 80's.

(Ekhardt, 2017)



fig. 16.

As part of the window-display installation, as mentioned in the above quote, the wallpaper behind Bond was a pattern that included the watercolor self-portrait, designed in collaboration with George Venson (*ibid*).



fig.17.

Bond's watercolours and performance both speak to the lack of role models for trans people, especially children; whereas most cisgender children model their selves and behaviour on parents or older siblings, trans people often have to find an external role model. Bond's work is a critique of that absence, and the similar absence (at least until recently) in commercial advertising (Rosen, 2017).

Bond's watercolours are, admittedly, crude; the sort of flat representation often found in elementary school or teenage drawings and portraiture. Considering the period they are referencing, this can be read as an intentional visual design to imply the auto-ethnography of the work. The act of standing in the window as a model presents Bond's own body as a substitute for the absent role models, down to even the subtle fact of the dress they are wearing. From a trans perspective it is also a visible, almost palpable reminder of unwanted attention in public, of being on forced display just by being out on the street; the discomfort of crowds; the cameras acting like magnifying glasses focusing the sun's light, the intensity of strangers staring, perhaps even pointing and whispering, which is not dissimilar to Aguhar's play with "proximity."

This identity [cognition] is not bound to just a physical body but also interacts, engages and affects the environment, as the wallpaper blurs boundaries between the environment and representation of the body. Talking about that body, and how through decisive action and inaction it is a trans body reflected by a decidedly transgender name, Bond stated, “I am creating a transbody—a physical record on my body and a medical record that I am a transgendered person” (Varrati, 2012).



fig. 18. Vitrine Gallery, 2015



fig. 19. My Model / My Self

4.3 Ianna Book (1973, Québec, Canada)

I have always felt the need to create thought-provoking visual arrangements in public spaces. My aesthetic research is centered on a critical appraisal of both the norms of the human landscape and the conservative status quo, opening the way to new cultural elements. [...] This approach came into its own as my transgender state became my greatest source of artistic inspiration and motivation. Indeed, ever since my inner state became an outer reality, I have been more motivated than ever to create, express various feelings related to my unconventional existence, and understand how it fits into the current social context. This experience makes me see the world in a new light, and as an artist, I want to share what I see. (iannabook.com, 2018)



fig. 20. *Trans and the Notion of Risk*

French-Canadian artist Ianna Book has a body of work that is practically a textbook definition of postmedia multidisciplinary. Following the earlier phase of her practice that involved drawing and sculpture, she has taken acute advantage of the opportunities for publication presented by postmedia technologies, be that the self-publication of a hardcopy photo-essay book, or video production and distribution on Vimeo.³² Her self-published book *Trans Avenue* is a photographic essay on transsexuality and the urban context (studioxx.org).

³² vimeo.com/iannabook, 2018.

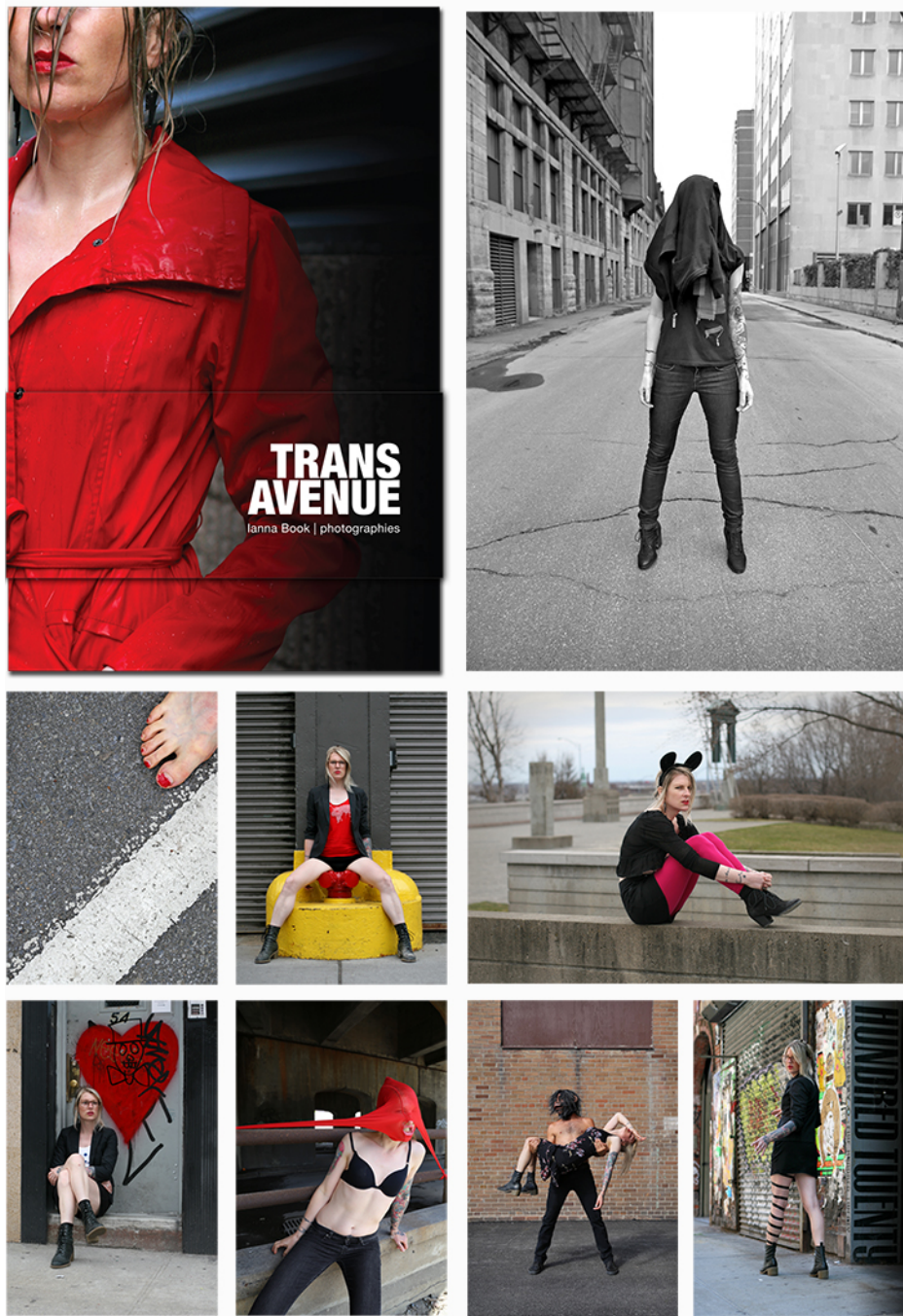


fig. 21. Trans Avenue

Trans Avenue was photographed during the period of Book’s transition, which is evident from the significant differences in her body that are visible in various photographs. The cityscape is also an important and reflective element, for as Book states, “The project is an aesthetic research combining transsexuality

and the urban context, the body and the city as spaces of transformation and emancipation” (Kowalska, 2014).

Printing endeavors also include a guerilla-styled poster campaign, as well as packaging for a conceptual artwork in the guise of a commercial product for those that wish to fetishize the trans body.



fig. 22. Trans Against Hate



fig. 23. Smelly Panties

Book's video documentation of interactive media installations, sound art and other such projects are particularly interesting, but her older, various series of drawings also present distinct realities of trans existence.³³ The physical violence visited upon trans bodies, the new emotions and sensations that are experienced during hormone and surgical intervention, or self-perceptions that are sometimes fractured, incomplete or chaotic. The trans embodied experience and interface is often a problematized one, and she makes that quite clear.

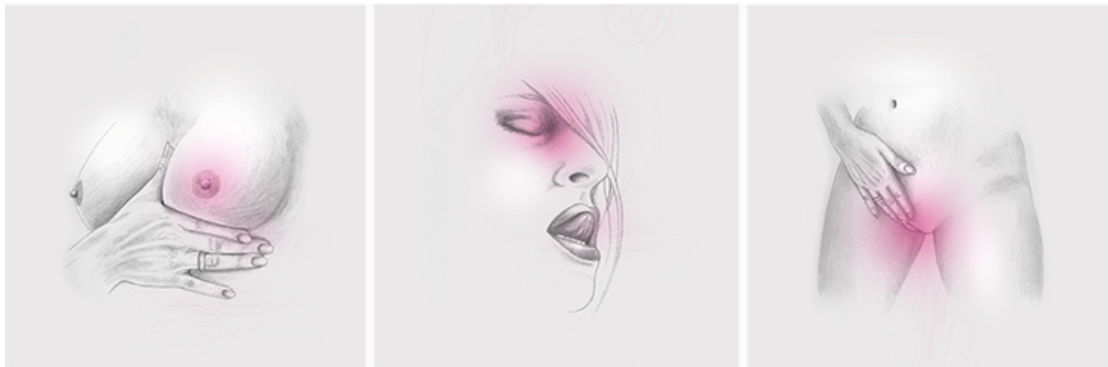


fig. 25. *New Orgasm is Felt*, Triptych, 2016



fig. 26. *Untitled*, experimental self-portraits, 2006

³³ One work by Book, *OK Lucid*, documents the various responses she received on the online dating site OK Cupid, once respondents discovered she was trans. (iannabook.com; <https://vimeo.com/275618524>).

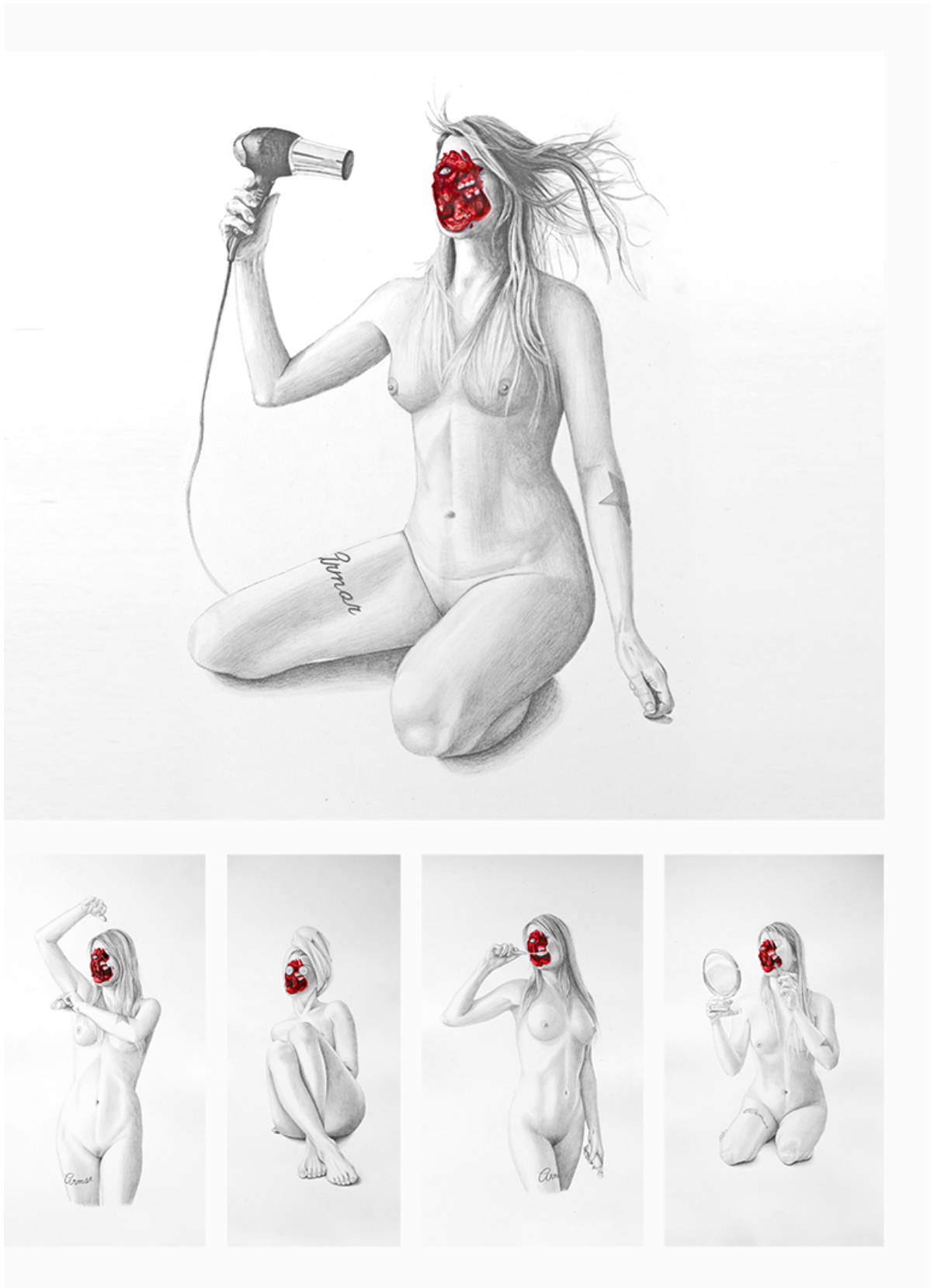


fig. 24. *You Can't Destroy Me and I can Take Care of Myself*, 2016-2017

4.4 Cassils (year unknown, Québec, Canada)

Cassils is a [Female-to-Male] performance artist and body builder who uses their own body in a sculptural fashion, thereby interrogating feminism, body art, and gay male aesthetics. Together, their body of work and physical body stretch and play with the boundaries between binary conceptions of gender, and between vulnerability and strength. Applying extreme techniques uncommon to the realm of contemporary art, such as body building, stunts, and martial arts, transgender physiques emerge that physically question notions of violence and resistance from a transgendered perspective... (cassils.net, 2015)



fig. 27. Cassils

Cassils (who prefers to be addressed by one name) is perhaps one of the most internationally recognized and written-about artists (perhaps most notably by David Getsy) within these precedents, and for good reason. Their multi-disciplinary work is as strong and evocative as their physical body. Cassils' work does not consider transgender as a concept of "crossing from one sex to another but rather as a continual process of becoming" (ibid). Cassils' conception of projects expertly blends traditional and contemporary media, using the documentation of a performance as yet another layer of meaning and production. The physicality –the *physiology*- of Cassils' work deftly tackles themes that might otherwise be dismissed as "just trans issues" and transcends any narrow interpretations, creating a widely accessible, shared experience (humanizing and universalizing a trans experience). The audience "knows" on a physical level the wet, dense resistance met when smacking a block of clay; they know the force associated with the sound of impact, and they can empathise with how it feels to have muscles strain, stretch and flex when they see it happen in front of them. Like Aguhar's, Cassils' work presents the tangled issues of recognition and display of the trans body in art (Getsy, 2015b pp12-13).

On Cassils' website, *Inextinguishable Fire* is described as presenting the audience with how violence and war are portrayed in the media. Audience members watch as Cassils' body is coated and covered in preparation, and then lit on fire for fourteen seconds (cassils.net, 2018).



fig. 28. Inextinguishable Fire



fig.29. Cassils' Inextinguishable Fire. Vimeo.

The video from that performance is then replayed outside on the wall of the building as pedestrians and traffic pass by obliviously. Similar to some of Cárdenas' projects, *Inextinguishable Fire* questions how easily a viewer can objectify "the other," especially in a media-saturated environment, and dispassionately remove the humanity from a victim with whom a viewer does not identify. Although this is done to illustrate or highlight how inured contemporary spectators (consumers) are to the portrayal of violence, Getsy manages to also read a second narrative within the performance, explaining how it critiques the aforementioned issue of representation of the trans body in trans art, by forcing the audience to look upon the body (as it is *transformed* by flame) while simultaneously hiding and cloaking the body (Getsy, 2018 p58).

Similarly, *Tiresias* (2012) also “problematizes” notions of visibility of the trans body (ibid). Tiresias was a character in Greek mythology who was turned into a woman for several years. During this durational performance, in reverse fashion Cassils’ body is partially obscured by an icy mould of a muscular male torso, which slowly melts from body heat over a number of hours (cassils.net, 2018). The performance is also presented as a shortened video loop projected onto plexiglass, which once again illustrates the postmedial condition of multiplicity of form.



fig. 30. Tiresias

Although it is a re-imagining or homage to a 1972 piece by artist Eleanor Antion, in which she documented a crash diet with the goal to achieve a more “perfect” body, *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture* also mirrors the online YouTube format of “transformation videos” so popular with (mostly) younger trans users (Horak, 2014). Rather than a diet and weight loss, however, Cassils documents the muscle gain and results from an extreme exercise and weightlifting regimen. The ultimate result, though, is the same: documentation of transformation, the force of will to physically alter the body and, by extension, the identity. Through the time lapse, it becomes evident that transformation is not a switch, but a process, one that may or may not have a definitive terminal point. *Tiresias* also once again highlights the public’s fetishistic obsession with, and demand for the right to witness, the trans body (Getsy, 2018b).

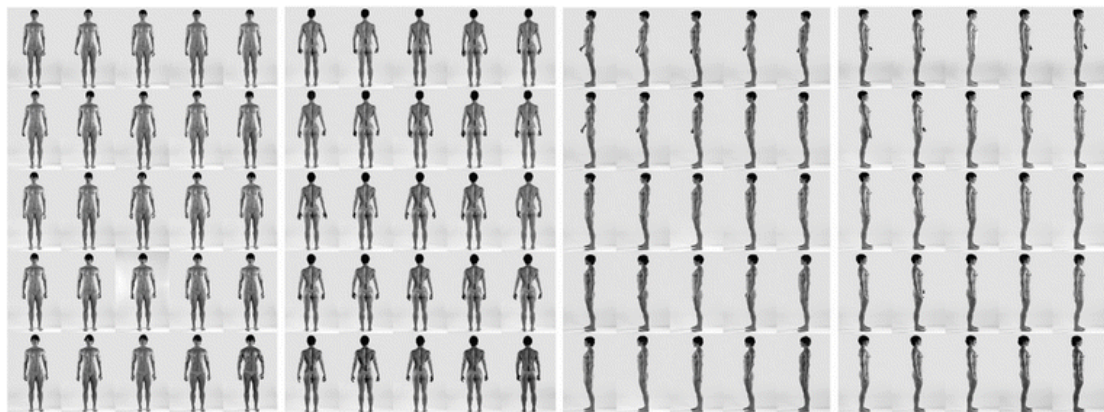


fig. 31. *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture*

Finally, *Becoming an Image* is an incredibly powerful piece that also evidences multiplicity of production and multimedia presentation, as well as the politics of representation of the trans body. That body is suggested but

presented only in momentary flashes- quite literally. For the first iteration, which is a performance, Cassils attacks a massive block of clay in the dark; the only sensory input audience members are privy to are the wet smacks of a body hitting the clay, except for the very brief moments when photography flashbulbs go off intermittently (Getsy, 2015b p19).



fig. 32. Becoming an Image (A)



fig. 33. *Becoming an Image (B)*

According to Getsy, with this piece Cassils sought to draw attention to the “long history of the appropriation or suppression of the presence of transfolk in and by lesbian, gay and queer histories, and Cassils sought to speak to the ways in which non-ascribed genders and gender variance were either misconstrued or inadequately represented by archives and histories based on gender” (ibid).

That two thousand pound [a little over 900 kilos] block of clay, with all its impact trauma and deformities from kicks and punches, was then cast in bronze and presented as a sculpture entitled *The Resilience of the 20%*, a reference, according Cassils, of a 20% rise in trans murders around the world in 2012.



fig. 34. The Resilience of the 20%

Continuing the successive iterations of the original project, in 2017 at a contemporary arts center in Omaha, Nebraska, this sculpture was then used in a performance called *Monument Push*, which involved Cassils pushing the object to various locations where violence was perpetrated against trans and other marginalized people (bemiscenter.org, 2017). Whereas the clay form infers a sense of mutability and transformative capacity, a permanently fixed material like bronze is a commentary on the fixed, immutable facts of violence experienced by trans bodies.

4.5 Zackary Drucker (1983, New York, USA)



fig. 35. Zackary Drucker, In Collaboration with Manuel Vason, 2010

Zackary Drucker's work is extremely narrative and performance-oriented, focusing on familial (and matrilinear) concepts, similar to the family and cultural narrative videos of artist Buzz Slutzky (buzzslutzky.com, 2018). However, Zackary also co-ops mass-media formats to present staged

performances and discourses. In addition, she performs short stories as well as non-chronological videos that express phrasing and social responses, or emotions dealt with as a trans person. She has collaborated on photography and documentary projects with her partner, trans photographer Amos Mac, as well as now-trans-identifying Wu Tsang, who tends to focus more on documentary as a filmmaker.³⁴

I've always felt super confident because I come from a supportive family, and that's a privilege lots of trans people haven't had. I grew up with this message that I could be whoever I wanted to be, and the sky was the limit in terms of what I could achieve.

– Zackary Drucker (arts.gov, 2016)

Welcome Mat is an incredibly simple, yet strong photography/consumer-object project, which presents its meaning quite clearly with the object and placement used.



fig. 36. *Welcome Mat* (A)

³⁴ Amosmac.com, 2018 & wutsang.com, 2018

As stated on her website, “for only \$100 you can wipe your feet on my face for a lifetime.”



fig. 37. Welcome Mat (B)

The reference to the English phrase “walk all over me” is taken quite literally, and exhibits the feeling that many trans people may experience in social settings or interactions, a sort of hierarchy where it is still permissible to make trans people the butt of jokes even in mainstream television shows and films (Keegan, 2013).³⁵ This project perfectly and quite literally exemplifies the artist’s opinion regarding the cultural objectification of trans bodies, and the value placed upon them.

³⁵ Not to mention the daily ridicule, vehemence and abuse experienced in person and online.

Just one of many videos from Drucker's library of work, *You Will Never Be A Woman* addresses similar concerns, specifically with regards to the comments that are often directed towards MtF trans people.



fig. 38. *You Will Never Be a Woman*, video still

As explained by Rebecca Gross in a 2016 interview with Drucker for the National endowment for the Arts, it presents “chilling incantations of LGBT slurs juxtaposed against the tranquility of an autumn landscape” (Gross, 2016).

Figure 35, the introductory photo of Drucker, seemingly presents her as a target, similar to the carnival or circus attraction of a woman strapped to a giant wheel for knife-throwing acts. The knives (and forks) in question, however, are table knives, suggesting that her body is a commodity offered up for popular consumption. In a case of convergent evolution, a similar image is presented in

Part III. Although the particulars of intent of the work might differ, the feeling of the body as a target is very much the same.



fig. 39. Drucker. You Will Never Be A Woman. Vimeo.

4.6 Raphaële Frigon (year unknown, Canada)



fig. 40.

At the intersection of biology and technology, Raphaële Frigon’s work explores ideas of “identity-building processes”.³⁶ Regarding the interest in new technologies, this is similar in spirit to the work and research of artist and lecturer Micha Cárdenas (Cárdenas et al, 2008). It also echoes how the website of transeverythingism.com describes the associated creative practice as the “Intervenience of Art, Identity and Technology” (transeverythingism.com, 2018).

³⁶ From Frigon’s website, frigo.ca. (accessed 2018).

Among various other exhibitions, art and scientific conferences, as a fellow Canadian trans artist Frigon's work was presented in an exhibition curated by previously mentioned artist Ianna Book (Olivier & Laurin, 2016).

On her website and interactive platform for the project *INPUT: Socially Mediated Identity*, visitors can type in a label or identity; when Frigon passes her hand in front of a specially programmed reader, with an RFID chip that she had surgically implanted in her finger, the newest typed-in identity or descriptor will show up. Frigon states, "It is uncomfortable to admit it, but no matter how much I strive to define myself, I still rely on the other to recognize, acknowledge me," which acknowledges and perfectly illustrates the socially-constructed aspect of identity (Butler, 1990).



fig. 41. *INPUT* (A)

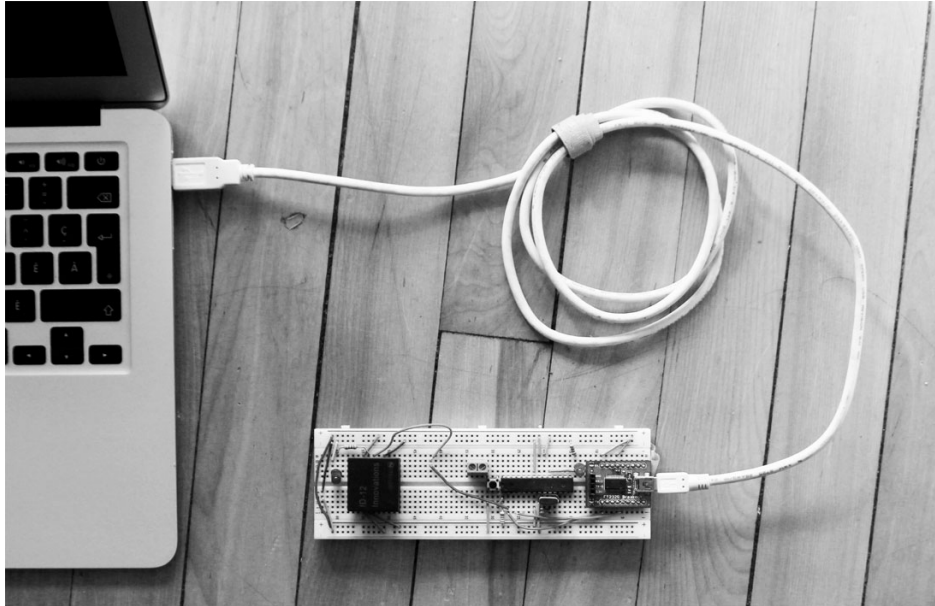


fig. 42. INPUT (B)

For the project *Diamonds Under My Skin – Very Personal Jewelry*, to fight the feeling of inadequacy or of being *less-than* in society, “Frigon implants diamonds under her skin in an attempt to place herself in a position of power over her own body. Through her use of biomedical technology Frigon’s actions examine how value and realness are constructed by our economy while still striving to challenge this system” (Cameron, 2014). In both of these pieces, I detect a fascination with the internality of the body that I can relate to, the idea of something hidden that, if just exposed, might define or defend the constituent identity. Whereas Frigon buries value within her body (*encarnates* it, as it were), an almost opposite process is presented in Chapter 5.2.



fig. 43. Diamonds Under My Skin



*fig. 44. Frigon. Explaining *Diamonds Under My Skin*. Vimeo.*

Frigon's body of work in general is a balance of her mastery over new technologies and an honest exposure of her experiences and thoughts on the dichotomy between social and personal ways of defining, interpreting and valuing an identity.

4.7 Juliana Huxtable (1987, Texas, USA)



fig. 45. Juliana Huxtable

Juliana Huxtable is a New York-based multidisciplinary artist and musician. Besides being an artist herself, she has been a model for other artists and projects, most notably Frank Benson's 2015 sculptural work, *Juliana* (Fig. 98, p213). Huxtable has co-written a science fiction book called *Life* (Fialho, 2017). Sci-Fi has been an influence in her earlier work, which among other topics investigated identity and the body, more recent work has been research into language, conspiracy theories and other counter-cultures (guggenheim.org, 2018).

Commissioned by MoMA in 2015, *There Are Certain Facts That Cannot Be Disputed* consists of three vignettes that “address the vexed relationship between the ephemeral nature of digital information and the drive for historical documentation in cyberspace...” (moma.org, 2015). Practically speaking, these consisted of the artist narrating three texts, in front of projected images while sharing the stage with musicians and actors, the three parts being TRANSITION, MOURNING, and AVATARS (Edwards, 2016).



Fig. 46. There Are Certain Facts That cannot Be Disputed (A)



fig. 47. *There Are Certain Facts That Cannot Be Disputed (B)*

Each of the three texts reflects on a particular and distinct facet of the paradigm shift of information, history and data from physical formats to online/digital systems that, according to their nature, are at once both immortal in theory, and yet painfully impermanent in practice. This is, then, largely a commentary on the very shift to a postmedial existence, addressing the capacity of the internet to accommodate minority voices and perspectives (and yet easily erase, obscure or delete them, in the face of inadequate legal safeguards, or “net neutrality”). As a performance it also comments indirectly on additional postmedia/trans concepts like multiplicity of identity (such as with the use of avatars, or online representations of a person or user of a particular website).

In her 2017 exhibition at Reena Spauling Gallery, *A Split During Laughter at the Rally*, Huxtable presents a multidisciplinary array that included graphic poster prints, “refrigerator magnets,” diagrams and the eponymous video, in an appropriated “digital info-shop aesthetic” (Huxtable, 2017).



fig. 48. *Transsexual* and *The War On Proof*



fig. 49. *A Split During Laughter at the Rally* (Installation shot)

The exhibit explores an online environment of identity politics, trans and post-gender issues, and subcultures of paranoia and conspiracy theories. In the eponymous video, Huxtable narrates in blue lipstick over a montage of rallies, and protestors, trans and queer activists talking (or shouting) into the camera. It is a chaotic and seemingly random selection of clips, images and monologues that can easily leave the viewer with a vertiginous feeling of unease and confusion about the intersectional maelstrom they are experiencing.



fig. 50. An excerpt from A Split During Laughter at the Rally



fig. 51. A Split During Laughter at the Rally, video still (A)



fig. 52. *A Split During Laughter at the Rally*, video still (B)

Although the *style* of Huxtable’s music isn’t necessarily relevant here, the fact that she does involve music and performance in her work *is*. It is indicative of the same willingness and ability to transition to the most appropriate medium, or set of media, in particular as they cater to different sensorial inputs or experiences, for the efficacious conveyance of a particular narrative. As noted in the description of her individual projects, she has performed narratives onstage with musicians, but she is also a deejay. In either case, her body is situated in a place of relevance to the act, integral to the event, either on stage as performer or set apart from a crowd on the pop culture pedestal that is the DJ booth. In this sense, her work shares a similarity with that of virtually all the aforementioned artists. Especially with her interest in “counter-culture” groups, Huxtable illustrates a trans experience that orientates the trans body as a social inflection point, contentious in its conspicuousness.

4.8 Ana (Diego) Marchante Hueso (1984, Pamplona, Spain)

'Genderhacker' is a state of eternal transition and denial of extreme binarism by which the indecisive body must move from one of the two allowed identities to the other and never stay in the middle. A gender pirate, adrift... (genderhacker.net, 2018)

Diego Marchante Hueso has a multidisciplinary practice that includes gender, feminist and trans activism, graphic design (similar to Huxtable), and performance and video. Hueso, who received a doctorate in Fine Arts from the University of Barcelona in 2015 (Marchante, 2015) has also worked on photography projects with Mar C. Llop, another Spanish photographer and artist (Llop, 2014). Marchante maintains a strong online presence and uses social media to promote both the art and activism that make up his practice.

In the project *D.N.I. – DragKing No Identificado* [Unidentified Drag King], Marchante criticizes the entrenched binary modalities in contemporary societies that are reinforced by restricted options available, in this instance on the Spanish national identity card (or DNI). In Marchante's words:

This action-representation denounces how a small plastic card like the DNI produces, controls, and reinforces the multiple [binary] divisions between legal and illegal, national and foreign, men and women, male and female, etc. Divisions that conform to a fixed identity, that do not allow any ambiguity regarding the subjects, and that is not modifiable. [This project is] resistance to an identity assignation system that does not allow for the autonomous management of gender or sex. [It is a] producer of foreigners [*extranjeros*] and foreign genders [*extrangéneros*]. (translated from genderhacker.net, 2018).³⁷

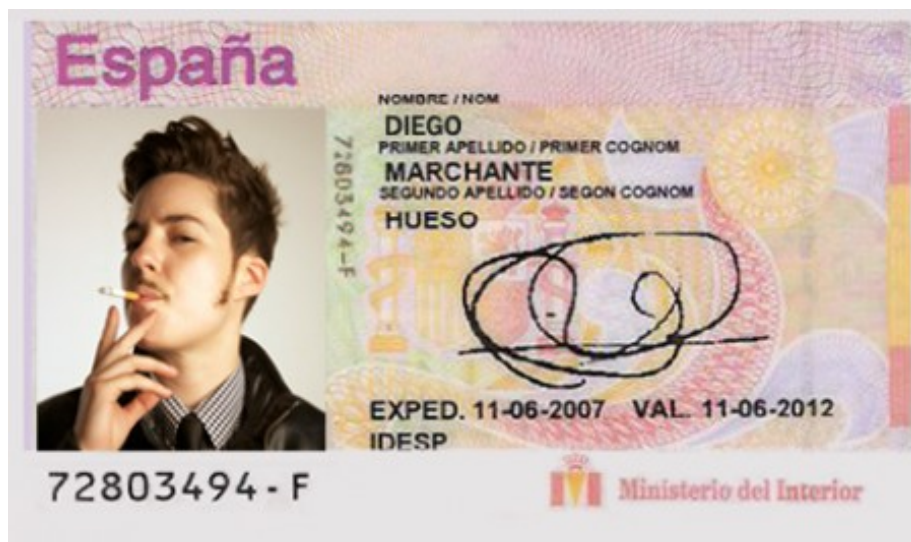


fig. 53.

Practically speaking, what Marchante has done is “hack” their national identity card and, essentially, commit fraud by creating a multitude of identities. This illustrates the trans desire for a sense of autonomy and authority over how they

³⁷ In the description of this project, Marchante uses an excellent play on words that loses some of its cleverness in translation; usually in Spanish “foreigner” is spelled “*extranjero*,” but by spelling it with a G, the similarity to “*género*, or “gender,” is increased. The art and projects reviewed in Part III will also exhibit an affinity for wordplay and a contextual importance placed on text.

are identified, and therefore how they are interacted and engaged with. Also evident is the postmedial theme of multiplicity, and the affinity (or at least ambivalence) for making, and re-making an identity, and successive identities.



fig. 54

Transformers is a four-minute video comprised of a collection of archived black-and-white cinema, including films like those by Groucho Marx and The Marx Brothers, *Some Like It Hot*, *Victor/Victoria* and others. There are also some more recent video clips from *Silence of the Lambs* and Bugs Bunny cartoons. In all the clips, differently gendered characters mimic or lampoon the attire, affectations or mannerisms of their “opposite,” which also in some instances is indistinguishable from homoeroticism. It is overwhelmingly done for “comedic” affect (Keegan, 2013) if it is a man acting like a woman, or for “shock” value if it is a woman exhibiting male mannerisms (known as “moxie”). During the short video, music by Peaches plays in the background, with a refrain of “I, U, She, together, c’mon baby let’s go.”³⁸

³⁸ A song made popular by the TV show, *The L Word*. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vS1xzQK92sM>



fig. 55. Transformers

There are numerous examples in older films (as well as mythological stories from religions around the world) of gender-swapping roles and affectations. The fact that such actions are so common in stories and entertainment worldwide only further illustrates the ubiquity of nonbinary and gender nonconforming people. Representations in more recent, twentieth- and twenty-first-century entertainment (film, television and online platforms) proves that vitriol against trans people is mostly recent to the past century, due largely to the (religious) views on gender roles and power that were imported with colonialism, of which we are only now witnessing a slow erosion (Debold, 2012).

Transcyborgllera is another (yet, silent) video comprised of clips, with fast transitions between the images of trans activism, queer historical photographs, and celebratory or defiant contemporary imagery.



fig. 56. *Transcyborgllera* video still

Besides being reminiscent of Juliana Huxtable's video of activists and protesters, in its manic assault on the senses, the title of *Transcyborgllera* is seemingly a nod to Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (Hopkins ed, 1998). Besides demonstrating a deft competency in postmedial skills of research, collection, and digital video collage, these two videos together illustrate the access and opportunities that a postmedia environment afford artists. For not only would Marchante and other not have the access to publish videos that was previously the domain of the hegemonic corporate media, but neither would there be the comparably easy access to the thousands of images and videos from which these pieces were created, not to mention the affordability of easy editing software.



fig. 57. *Transcyborgllera* video stills

The superfast montage of images yet again is proof of the overwhelming presence of trans and queer identities, and the community and cooperation that the internet and social media sites support. In different ways and aesthetics, both of these videos are homages to a longstanding history of trans existence and presence. Within *Transcyborgllera*, I am intrigued by the juxtaposition of trans representation and “glitch” art or aesthetic that is snuck into various frames. Can the corruption of digital imagery that represents coding errors could be seen as a metaphor for trans identity, something more interesting and

dynamic because how it is presented? Popular aesthetics and creative thinking, visually as well as musically, have been irrevocably changed; the glitch is a feature, not a flaw.



fig. 58. I'm Your Man video still.



fig. 59. I'm Your Man video still.

Made in 2007, *I'm Your Man* revisits Marchante's fascination with Batman as an icon of masculinity, which influenced a series of videos (vimeo.com, 2007). While the persona in the video slowly dresses in traditional, almost vintage male clothing- tie, suspenders, watch chain- the song *I'm Your Man* by Leonard Cohen plays out. As the character finally slips on a suit coat, the camera pulls out to show that they are also wearing a Batman mask.

There is a powerful sense of masculinity derived from the juxtaposition of the slow, deliberate ritual of adornment of 20th century iconography of male vestments; the deep, likely familiar, casual roll of Leonard Cohen's voice; and the body of mythology and representation packed into the façade of the Batman. All of these belie and make almost invisible, almost irrelevant, the actual stature and slight build of Marchante, so powerful is the narrative and identity that is constructed.

This is also not the first reviewed practice in which there is evidence of a fascination with or influence from fictional characters. As in the other projects with similar origins or influences, this one includes a certain innate sense of humor regarding its portrayal, even if the characters in the videos themselves are deadpan and serious. As Marchante states in their Batman Manifesto: "Those who want to see Batman as the protagonist himself would like to be seen, they will put a mask of good humor upon their face."



fig. 60. Marchante. *I'm Your Man*, as part of *The Batman Project*. Vimeo.

Whereas masks are most typically used to *conceal* the identity of the wearer, in this instance it is used to *convey* the nature of the trans identity it has been co-opted to represent. This is a relevant point for the review of the creative practice. Not only is The Batman masculine, but as a mythological character he is the epitome of “masculine” social traits: he is smart, bold, fearless, decisive; he is action-oriented and physically capable... he is, in a word, a superhero. So for a trans masculine person to “expose” their self by donning the mask, it is not just representing manhood, but a pride and a claim to the exceptionalism of a trans identity.

Throughout Chapter 4, I reviewed the external precedents of practice: eight trans artists whose work I consider not only to be postmedia, but particularly relevant to the creative practice central to this research. There are several notable features and themes that were uncovered, which correspond to the characteristics of postmedia experience detailed in Chapter 2. Also frequently exhibited within the various practices is an importance of the body, both as a performative social construct as well as an essentially experienced, gendered component of identity. There has been shown a common importance of orientating the body through presentation or performance, whether live or recorded, fully capitalizing on the audiovisual capacity of contemporary narration. I continue to expand the contextual precedents of practice in Chapter 5, reviewing two exhibitions that were developed as part of the creative practice prior to this research, and which dealt specifically with aspects of transitioning- *WAKE*, which was developed during the beginning of my transition process, and my first show as a legally identified female, *It Looks Like / It Appears To Be / An Inside Job*. I will detail the exhibitions in general, and then present a granular discussion regarding any relevant themes or concepts as they are evident in particular components or pieces of work.

Chapter 5: Previous Works

5.1 WAKE - 10/05/2013

The multimedia sculptural installation of this show is comprised of eight years' worth of detritus, artefacts and abandoned materials, from the founding and managing Ireland's largest art studio network. It is at once both the evidence of the passage of a massive undertaking, as well as the public viewing of a role and identity laid to rest- not only retiring from being the day-to-day manager, but also undergoing a very visible gender transition, from publicly identifying as male to identifying as female... from Bear to Kay, as it were. (transeverythingism.com, 2014)



fig. 61. WAKE

WAKE was a solo exhibition at Bio.space 033 Gallery, in Dublin, Ireland during May 2013. It was a multidisciplinary installation that consisted of an eight-meter-long, multimedia, interactive wall, that included two projections and two video screens, as well as an interactive sound installation and two smaller mixed media sculptures. The title was an integral element to the meaning of the exhibit, as it was both an event to acknowledge the passing of one identity (otherwise known as a *wake*), as well as the celebration of the *awakening* of the next.

The roughly-symmetrical wall mural stretched the entire length of the small gallery, from floor to ceiling, overwhelming viewers with its immensity and complexity. There was a scaling of detail that meant that each smaller part held within it even smaller elements to “read.” It had, at its center, an autobiographical figure laid to rest on the wreckage of the motorcycle that is featured in the CCTV footage of an accident, looping on one of the monitors elsewhere in the installation.



fig. 62. Inflection Point video stills



fig. 63. WAKE

The central wall-mounted figure has a motion-activated motor that allowed it to pan its gaze along the presented body, with a disco-ball-like, spinning reflective “halo.” Over its head is written, *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi*- “So passes the glory of the world.” Finally, above that is one of the monitors, presenting another video separately entitled, “Unshakeable Spector (*memento mori*),” which shows the corpse of a pigeon floating in front of continuously changing glitched imagery. This was a digital reflection of the actual pigeon corpses that were encased in recessed frames along the upper edge of the installation.



fig. 64. *Unshakeable Spector* video still



fig. 65. Video of *Unshakeable Spector* (*memento mori*)

Not only were the pigeon mummies found in the buildings the studios occupied, and the frames encasing them left behind by artists, but all the images in the glitched video were collected from the internet during the same ten-year period. The relevance of the glitch aesthetic will be discussed a bit later.

Two bas-relief angelic forms flank the central pieta-inspired diorama – one with its own spinning halo and the other with disco-ball mirrors installed in a starburst pattern around its head. Their wings are made from, as is the entire wall, detritus from art studios, either found when the buildings were first occupied, or left behind by successive and multiple tenants. Specifically, the wings include circular-saw blades, forks, spoons, paintbrushes, books and ID tags. The rest of the wall is composed of bits of wood, metal, keys, locks, lights, dolls and other figures. All the monitors, CD players and projectors were also abandoned items, a clear reminder of the ubiquity and value of technology.



fig. 66. WAKE production shot

The sound installation followed a similar aesthetic, also made up of various speakers, guitar effect pedals, amps and microphones that had been abandoned; the microphones were inserted into a Plexiglas cube containing a small, desktop water fountain that sat on top of a stacked mountain of the speakers; the sound of the audience and the room was then transmitted to various FX pedals and broadcast through those speakers.



fig. 67. WAKE production shot

Upon entering into the gallery, the overall effect was one of disequilibrium; a disorientation, a sense of vertigo- A *dysphoria* experienced from the overwhelming amount of information all presented at the same time, in challenge and conflict for attention and supremacy. The scale of the work warped –*queered*- the apprehension and perception of the scale and size of the one-room gallery; the installation becomes indistinguishable from the space it inhabits. It transgresses borders and liminal spaces between subject and object, between male and female, and between the environment and identity.

There is a conspicuous conflagration of the body and the environment in this work. If the entirety of the wall is read as an autobiography, there is multiplicity of bodily forms, multiplicity of roles in the narrative, and a nonlinearity, as there is no definite starting point and end point. The body repeats itself like a glitch throughout a backdrop, which itself is a body as well, with no duality or line of demarcation between the human form and environment; the mind [and meaning] permeate all indiscriminately. There is a pernicious attention to detail of the most trivial corners of the mural, yet a casual, almost blasé level of care given to details of bodily extremities- toes, fingers, or even arms or eyes are often ignored absent, or crudely represented. No one element seems to be given more attention than another, even if it is centrally located within the assemblage.

The age of the presented items, as indicated by the wear and damage done to them, is relevant and intentional in the presentation. Patina and surface age, especially of wood, is an ongoing and important element in the grammar or vocabulary of the creative practice of which installation is part. Wood, because it

was a living, cellular thing, and in that sense the scars and artifacts of engagement on its surface offer up a narrative of its experience, both as an organism and later as an object. The patina on metal, the handling and almost monastic, fetishistic rubbing of keys or locks or totems creates a history on the surface of items. Their existence creates an obsessive, artifactual chronology in a space where bodily permanence is neither existent nor expected. More importantly, though, it can and should be interpreted as a metaphor for the accumulated wear and distress that the human body collects and documents over decades- scars, tattoos, discolorations, disfigurements or even intentional alterations become a library, a biography of events and experiences.

There is still yet a more intimate and personal relationship intended here between the environment and the body: the complete subsumption and identification of the individual, previously considered to be an artist, within the role of “administrator.” This is at once a laying-to-rest of multiple identities- of “maleness” as well as “studio manager,” and a funerary process for all the physical remains that documented them.

The motorcycle-pieta is centrally located, as it represents the critical moment that defined future transformation, the reverence or at least acknowledgment of previous identities; the presence of the artist as multiple characters. It most acutely and obviously displays the existence of both male and female identities within the “body” of the piece; the central identity is present in both the Madonna and the Christ even as it passes from one to the other, multiple and successive at the same time.

5.2 It Looks Like / It Appears To Be / An Inside Job - 06/03/2014

IT LOOKS LIKE / IT APPEARS TO BE / AN INSIDE JOB
BY KAY BEAR KOSS

Opening Reception: Thursday, March 6th, 6pm
The Gallery at The National College of Art & Design



transeverythingism.com

www.ncadgallery.ie



fig. 68. Postcard invitation.



fig. 69. National College of Art & Design Gallery, 2014.

Like *WAKE*, the title of this show was intentionally ambiguous in offering multiple interpretations. *It Looks Like, It Appears To Be, and An Inside Job* can either be understood to be successive short sentences, or one [somewhat redundant] sentence as a whole. Separately, each phrase still can be interpreted in a multitude of ways- according to their idiomatic usage, or from a literal, physical, sensory, embodied understanding. The body of work follows form with the title and played with multiplicity of meaning as well. The show consisted of six pieces- four mixed media sculptures and two videos. The titles of the pieces all continue to be as important in their multiple meanings or inferences. Like *WAKE* before it, the show itself is overwhelmingly autobiographical, even if the aesthetic much more sparse and minimalistic. It is arguably one of the most significant exhibitions of this practice as a whole; but it was intentionally presented in such a way- with very little additional detail or supporting

documentation- so that each piece (and the overall exhibit) could be interpreted on an individual basis with minimal bias or influence.

Whereas the process of WAKE was to include everything possible as documentation, the process for this show involved selected removal, “cutting fat,” until the final six pieces remaining were all reflective representations of the trans body.

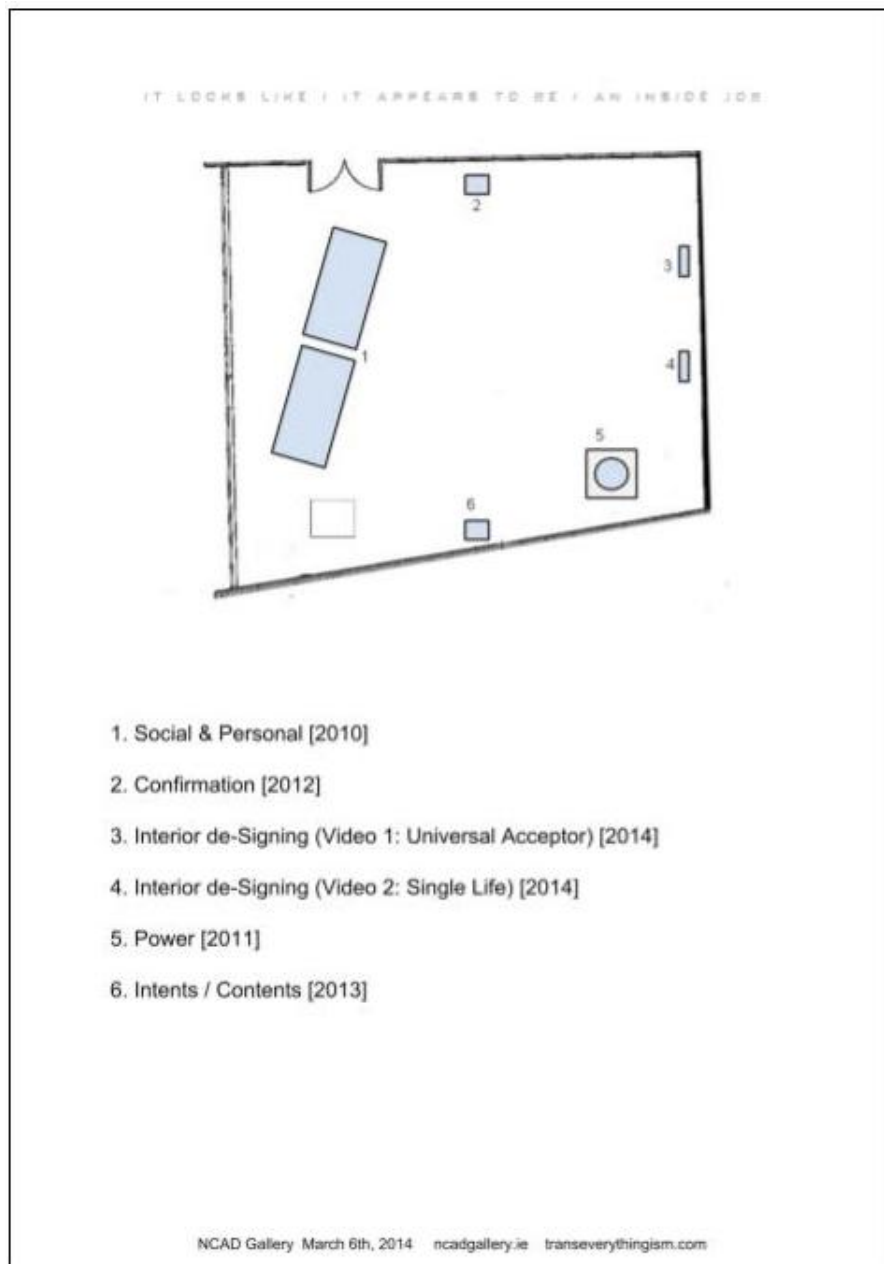


fig. 70. An Inside Job gallery map

Intents / Contents is a life-sized resin-cast face that sits on a plinth, from the same mould used for the plaster faces in *WAKE*. Set within the resin is a sliver of jawbone that was surgically removed during a process known as Facial Feminization Surgery [FFS], undertaken in Marbella during 2012.



fig. 71. intents/Contents front



fig. 72. Intents/Contents profile

Whereas the actual identity of the plaster face[s] in WAKE was intended to be more clearly discernable, the clear-ness of this cast actually obfuscates and complicates visual recognition; in its transparency, it actually acts as more of a generic, three-dimensional map of *a face*, in order to orientate the bone fragment in the chin- which ultimately is just another artifact held onto as documentation of a previous identity, yet transforms this face-as-map into not just a self-portrait, but also a genetic duplicate, a lo-fi clone.

Referring back to the title of the piece, ostensibly the bone shard is the “contents” in a very literal sense, as it is contained within the resin; however, the contents of the piece also include the identity represented, whether explicitly named or not; in fact, the *absence* of positive confirmation could also arguably be considered part of the contents, and so too the *intent* becomes *content* of the artwork- and *vice versa*. The visibility of the contents of the face-as-container is the intention of its transparency. *Intents* and *Contents*, two words that have little or no meaning in common, are then conflated into one concept, presenting a nondual existence as two things and yet one thing, at the same time.

Interior De-Signing II (Single Life) is a thirty-six minute looped video shown on a 100cm portrait-oriented monitor. It was made with a USB-video microscope recording semen on a specimen slide. During the course of the entire video, only a single sperm cell passes through the screen.



fig. 73. Interior De-Signing II (Single Life) video



fig. 74. Interior De-Signing II (Single Life) video still

Interior De-Signing I (Universal Acceptor) is a twelve minute, fifty-five second video played on loop, and shown on a 100cm, portrait-oriented monitor.

Using the same video-enabled USB microscope, it shows AB+ blood cells (otherwise known as the *universal acceptor* bloodtype) cascading down the frame.



fig. 75. Interior De-Signing I (Universal Acceptor) video

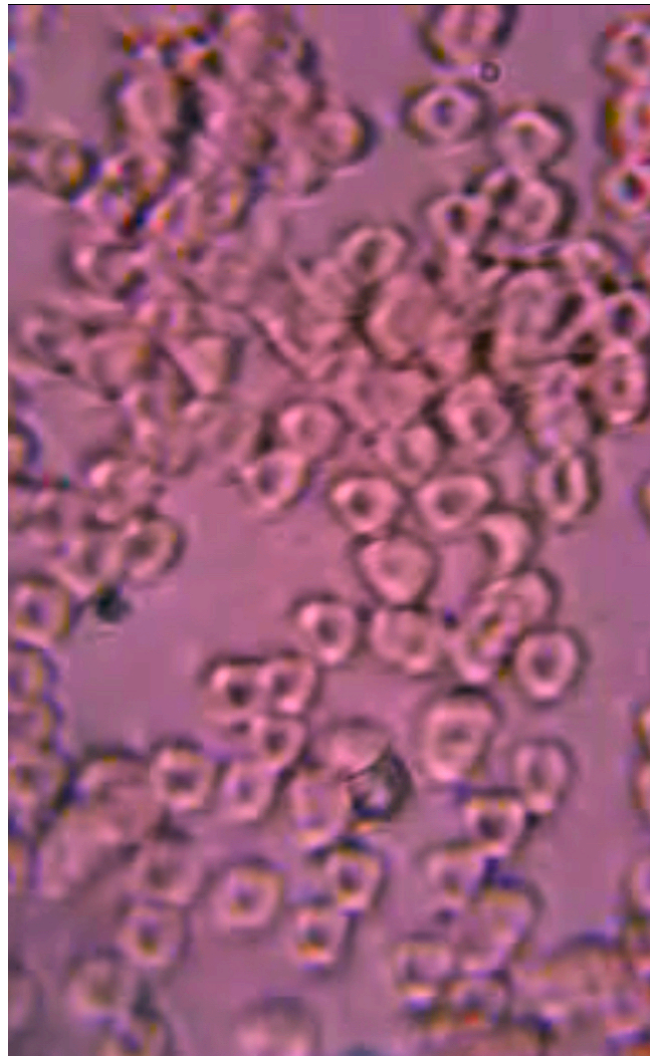


fig. 76. Interior De-Signing I (Universal Acceptor) video still

As a pair of videos, *Interior De-Signing I & II* are presented as microscopic, autobiographical portraits, which is why the monitors were mounted in portrait, rather than landscape format. So, similar to *Intents / Contents*, there is an identification via an unchangeable, indelible, genetic, objective, bodily fact, and cast-off parts of the body as artifactual documentation. Facets of an identity, granular parts that do not exhibit the transcendent or emergent properties of the whole.

Of course the titles of the works in this exhibit are as important as the visual elements themselves. There is reference to the practice of arranging the elements of the spaces and environments lived within, while presenting microscopic documentation of interior components of a body navigating those spaces. By deconstructing the word “Design” as *de-signing*, what is signified is the problematization of identifying our selves and others, what parts are identified with, and the importance and meaning attributed to those individual elements and the constituent whole of which they are a part. There is no way to recognize a person from a photo of their bodily fluids. Or organs, or bones, for that matter. There is, at the same time, *no* significance and *incredible* significance that can be attributed to these “portraits.”

The subtitle of Video I, *Universal Acceptor*, refers to the term applied to those with the bloodtype AB+. So even as the microscopic universality of the imagery of blood is de-signifying any identifying characteristic like race or gender, the subtitle is simultaneously providing at least one autobiographical detail.

Even though the first video documents hundreds, if not thousands of living blood cells gently cascading and flowing down the screen, as a *singularia*

tantum [a word with no distinct plural form] it is still and also just a single thing-blood. Video II does the same, but in a different way. *Single Life* darkly yet comically alludes to the solitary pursuits that would produce the sort of specimen necessary for this video, while simultaneously and specifically referring to the single living cell that eventually wanders onstage, so to speak.

These two video-portraits are paired because although they both accomplish the same thing, they do so in markedly different ways: the blood presents a humanizing condition while occluding gender identification; the semen ostensibly presents confirmation of gender that in actual fact is contradictory to the autobiographical human condition.

Confirmation is a two-part Lucite frame held together with embedded magnets. Inside is etched an enlarged thumbprint scan, which has then been filled with AB+ human blood. At 28 x 12cm, it was presented bolted to a plinth to hinder its opening.



fig. 77. Confirmation

The title, *Confirmation*, along with the visual presence of a fingerprint, implies the sense of legal, financial, political or national identity- whom one might “officially” be. That indelible feature of personhood is used as a key to access all those elements of society that permit life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The presence of blood, however, problematizes that documentary concept of identity: is it the documents that correlate to the fingerprint, or is it the body? If the paperwork isn’t updated, is the identity still the same if the body or name changes? Could successive identities share the same fingerprint, and how would that complicate “confirmation” of personhood?

As a display, there is more empty visual space that makes up the piece than color or material. In that sense, it is as delicately indefinite as the digital 1's and 0's that confirm our status as living, breathing citizens, account holders, landlords or lawbreakers. As a pattern -a design- it is arbitrarily vital in importance to modern life, yet as fragile, delicate and as easily destroyed as the design or pattern of a pair of lace tights. Similar to the videos, as a portrait (the image is also presented in portrait format rather than landscape) it is evidence of the existence of a person without providing any further defining traits- it simply confirms, "I exist." Through its ambiguity, it questions established concepts of identity. In this regard, it is similar in concept to Diego Marchante's production of multiple identity cards in his work, *D.N.I.*

At over five meters long, *Social & Personal* is arguably one of the three most monumental pieces within this arts practice- both in size and implication. Created in 2010, it followed the creative and aesthetic processes that started with *Power* the year before, which was also presented in the exhibit. It is composed of antique, reclaimed floorboards. Ranging in size, width and thickness, it seems that the boards were stacked in a random pile, and then cut *en masse* to reveal an internal structure that is a blank, featureless surface.



fig. 78. Social & Personal

Once again, the wood presents an external “skin” that is rough, aged, marred, dirty and raw. This time, however, it is *also* a thing that is made up of other things- a “pile” of wood made up of individual boards.

There is perhaps little speculation about what the inside of a piece of wood looks like- it is wood; cut it open and it is more wood- whirls and growth rings. But this conceptual object, that is arbitrary but linguistically agreed upon- this human concept of a “pile”- what secrets hide inside? What attributes does it

possess that transcend its constituent parts? How many pieces can be taken away before it is no longer a “pile?” If individual pieces are removed and replaced with other boards, is it still the same pile?³⁹

Again, the age and patina on the boards make them familiar and knowable, even identifiable from each other. There is a history and narrative existent on their surface, even if part of that history was sanding and buffing away earlier dents and blemishes over the years. They are knowable, in the finite amount of surface features, however numerous... unlike the vast potential of the empty surface of the exposed interiority. There is an inherent contradiction between the plurality of the exterior- a multitude of boards and their marks- and the singular, unified façade of the cut surface, the infinity of potential it presents. The numerous façades and personas that we wear or inhabit every day are just part of a whole, like the boards in a pile, but it is a whole that is, very likely, unknowable in its entirety- and therein lies the meaning of the title. As an object, perhaps as an effigy of a body, it reminds me of Cassils’ *Becoming an Image*, with its scars and history on display. It makes me want to cut Cassils’ big clay block in half and see what sort of internal biology it possesses.

³⁹ The Ship of Theseus is a philosophical conundrum: basically, if you have a wood ship, and slowly replace each board or component as it rots away, is it still the same ship? If you took each piece and slowly built a second ship out of them, which one would actually be the Ship of Theseus (Yanofsky, 2013). This refers in part to the fact that within seven years, every cell in a human body has been replaced, which begs the question of whether a human is physical matter or is actually just a pattern [information]; also, as advanced prosthetics increase the intimacy between biological and technological systems, which parts of the body and brain can be replaced- or how many- while still recognizing and acknowledging the individual?

During the review of these precedents, it has been confirmed that there are, in fact, similar and shared elements between the practices of the eight artists, as well as with the prior works of this creative practice. Supporting the hypothesis of this research, many of the elements identified are characteristic of both trans identities and postmedia experiences, specifically: Multiplicity, Malleability, Transformation As A Continual Process, and Visibility Of The Invisible. This review provides an opportunity to understand the similarities and differences between the overall field and the creative practice, and allows this research to situate the practice within that field. All of the research so far allows for a full contextual understanding of the results and processes of this practice.

Although it was uncertain if the selected practices *would* have any shared features, besides the aforementioned there was also frequently an evident interest in, or influence of technology and futurism, especially as they comment upon the effect of technology upon biological identity and determinism. There were also multiple examples of appropriation of elements from mass media, including platforms for publication, and pop culture references. Perhaps the most socio-politically motivated feature was the use of performance as a means of reclaiming narrative authority and embodied agency. The majority of these themes are related to *embodiment* and *presentation*. Both of these can perhaps be best understood by considering authority, or *agency*: control over the body,

its state of being, modification and performance; and control over the engagement of personal narrative and social presentation.

These case studies were approached from a trans* orientation, as shaped by the information discussed in Part I, including the concept of embodied cognition. A brief description of the general field of phenomenology was covered, how embodied cognition supports and informs such a methodology, and how such a methodology can in turn support- and is ideally designed *to* support- contrarian minority studies like Queer Theory or Trans Studies, and has been modified into new analytical tools like Queer and Trans* Phenomenology.

Together, this all provides a situating context for understanding the creative practice, its processes and goals and results.

The following two chapters in Part III review the various projects and works that were produced and presented during this research, situated within a robustly explicated contextual framework. I approach the projects from a Trans* Phenomenological orientation, which is now further developed and informed by the previous findings in Parts I and II, and discuss how the processes and results succeed, or perhaps fall short, in presenting an authentic trans narrative.

Part III: Transeverythingism: Body of Work

My hell – my rules.

(Alyokhina, 2017 p177)

Chapter 6: Aldona's Daughter



fig. 76. Close-up of *Love letters From Strangers*.

Trans narratives are positive accounts of transgender experiences—narrative reclamations that exist on their own terms [...] A method for reading trans narratives must be akin to the trans experience itself. As such, it must firstly and most fundamentally, show trans lives as *lived* and thus livable.

N.F. Baldino (2015)

All of the projects presented within *Aldona's Daughter* are intricately related and mutually referential; they are the results from the same themes and

threads. Different roots of one main focus, exhaustively explored, reworked, reiterated and reproduced. It is the trajectory of the first experience of romance, desire and intimacy as a queer-lesbian-transgender female- and the subsequent rejection, heartbreak, anger, self-doubt and frustration. The reworking and revisitation of every minute detail is akin to the self harm of cutting- some sort of pain in order to feel alive, rather than numb; a release of pressure, an “alternative outlet for emotional pain” (Hendriksen, 2016). Throughout reviewing all the results presented in the subchapters, I approach them and attempt to discuss them from a trans-embodied perspective.

SkyBelow follows the development of a specific imagery that develops from a digital collage, to an identity represented by a mask (like Marchante’s Batman), to an audiovisual narrative presented as a music video.

Love Letters From Strangers / Strange Letters From Lovers discusses the visual and multimedia results from the further exploration of the themes initiated in that project, as presented in a solo exhibition.

And, developed concurrently, *Stunt Lover* is the lateral development of predominantly performance-oriented, imagery-supported audio narratives. Although both projects simultaneously reference, draw and comment upon the same concepts, concrete events, emotions and experiences, all three projects contribute towards the ultimate result, the production of the physical album, *Aldona’s Daughter*.

6.1 SkyBelow



fig. 80. SkyBelow, 2015

A new media object is not something fixed once and for all, but something, that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions. This is another consequence of the numerical coding of media ... and the modular structure of a media object ... Instead of identical copies [of 'old media' like print] a new media object typically gives rise to many different versions.

-Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, (MIT Press, 2001 p.36)

You're so whole, you're so complete; bet you find all that you seek.
Tell me what that's like to be; tell me lies I can believe. You're the
strangest angel that I've ever seen; you look like the devil dancing
in my dreams. Get thee behind me, I need no Revelation to see...

-*SkyBelow*, by Stunt Lover

As a digital collage with over 120 Photoshop layers and several weeks of work invested, *SkyBelow* was the first result produced as part of this doctoral research. Its first iteration was as a vinyl print affixed to a repurposed 100 x 100cm lightbox.⁴⁰ The original idea was slowly developed from a few scraps of lyrics that I was playing around with, as well as an x-ray photo of my chest that I had from a recent surgery. Of course the fascination with the inside of things

⁴⁰ One of the few abandoned items from years of managing art studios that did not end up as part of the WAKE installation (Chapter 5.1).

extends to x-rays.⁴¹ But with a medical artifact like an x-ray, it's not just about making the invisible *visible*, it is a reclamation of the body from an external medicalized discourse, much like the LGBT culture reclaiming the word "queer" for their own use. In this instance, however, it is a trans narrative "pathologizing" a cisgender body.

So I started to think about visual imagery of what might make up a metaphorical biology. Besides the chest x-ray, the collage is made entirely of found imagery, like a still version of Marchante's videos (Chpt. 4.8). Within the lungs are caged two symmetrical panthers. Since *WAKE*, this is the first element in a work to acknowledge the concept and importance of "imperfect symmetry" within this practice. Between the panthers is a provocatively positioned woman, whose legs help disturb the symmetry. The figure is flanked with wings adorned with text, and familiar text floats over the entirety of the image: INTENTS / CONTENTS.

The face is a composite of a woman's superimposed with the photo of a massive bronze doorknocker in the shape of a lion's head with a ring in its mouth. These feline images signify the zodiacal sign Leo, which is the sign for the woman who is Aldona's Daughter, whose eyes are used in the collage, and whose online dating website name was SkyBelow. So this image is a chimaera, a hybrid of the two of us; another relationship between two bodies, one of blurred boundaries that results in a new form, a new identity.

That persona slowly took on a presence, as the song developed alongside. *SkyBelow* was the track that encouraged the development of an onstage persona and the development, performance, recording and publishing of a concept

⁴¹ As discussed earlier, particularly in Chapters 4.7, about Frigon's work, and 5.2 about the exhibition *It Looks Like / It Appears to Be / An Inside Job*.

album. The visuals and the track finally combined in a storyboard for a short video that draws inspiration from the original collage for the design of the sole character. The video itself also exhibits a fascination with science fiction narratives, familiar from the earlier precedents like Huxtable (Chpt. 4.7).

The DIY-nature of the video, as well as the appropriation of online video at the beginning, are important and relevant, again similar to both Marchante's videos and Huxtable's preoccupation with conspiracy theorists and marginal online groups. The storyline, though never explicitly stated, follows the crash landing of a sort of "interstellar postal worker" whose look is based on the *SkyBelow* image, down to the feathered eyebrows and the x-ray chest (and a little inspiration from a popular bounty hunter character from a certain long-running sci-fi franchise). The character is in possession of a handful of yellow envelopes, presumably charged with delivering them before being derailed by the crash. *These yellow envelopes are a visual metaphor for the relationship* and reoccur throughout the various instalments of this overall project.



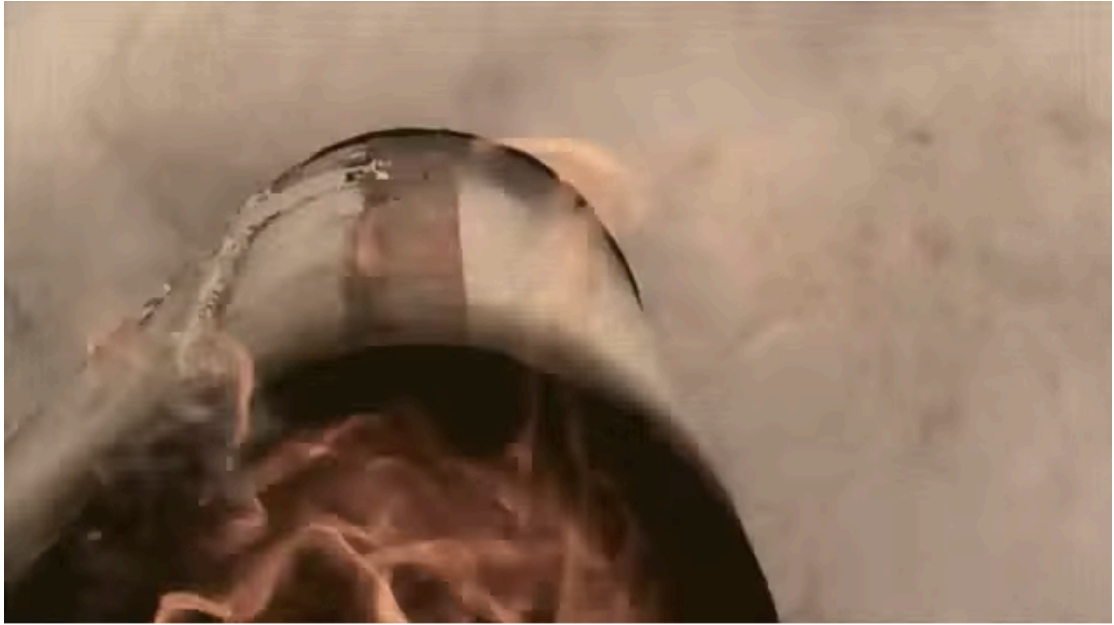
fig. 81. Production shot for *SkyBelow* video, 2015



fig. 82. Helmet from vacuum cleaner and washing machine liner.



figs. 83 & 84. Spaceship production.





figs. 85-89. SkyBelow video stills



fig. 90. SkyBelow Video on YouTube

If embodied cognition is applied literally in this video, this represents a conscious mind, in a body, in an environment. Given the visage, the mind should be considered as alien as the body, even in the absence of humans. This feeling of differentness is not necessarily an uncomfortable one; the fact that the character is the only body present makes it unique.

The original environment is the spacecraft, which is hardly bigger than a motorcycle with wings, and encompasses the character like a navigable shell. Upon landing, she finds herself in an austere, seemingly empty post-apocalyptic terrain. This is a transition from a safe, protective position into a lonely unknown. So there is a conflict between the comfort of the body and the uncertainty of the environment.

In the end, with decidedly trans* lyrics playing as the soundtrack, the character sees the futility of holding onto the letters, of trying to complete the job, and tosses them to the wind; she escapes the used up, dry landscape by jumping and sinking into the cool, dark depths of the water which provide a comfortable familiarity with the space from which she came. Regardless of how the act is interpreted, this is her reclaiming authority over her situation and narrative.

In keeping with the opening quote by Lee Manovich, and the postmedia characteristics already discussed, *SkyBelow* exists in a multiplicity of forms. Besides being presented as a wall-mounted print as part of the exhibit discussed in the next section, it also becomes the cover art for the ultimate production of this family of projects, the album *Aldona's Daughter*. In itself, that presence at the beginning and end is a satisfying symmetry. The video is also a satisfying project.

Objectively speaking, from a videographical point I argue that it stands up; although the recording quality might possess a “naiveté,” the pacing is appropriate and there is continuity between different angles and shots. The FX and detailing have a consistency to them, and the narrative is sufficiently open-ended to allow some interpretation while not being completely abstruse. Perhaps most satisfying is that there is now successfully a transgender scfi video short in the catalogue of this practice.

6.2 Love Letters From Strangers / Strange Letters From Lovers - 10/02/17

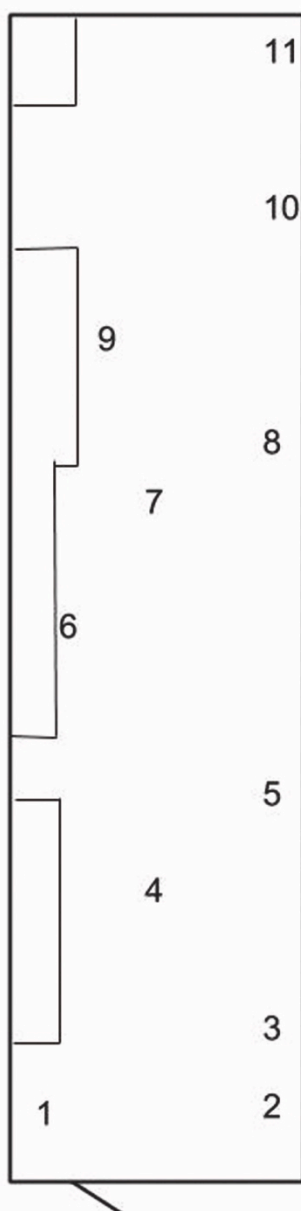


fig. 91. Show Poster.

LOVE LETTERS FROM STRANGERS / STRANGE LETTERS FROM LOVERS

CARTAS DE AMOR DE EXTRAÑAS / EXTRAÑAS CARTAS DE AMANTES

Narrativas Audiovisuales por Kaylee Bear Koss



Los códigos QR le llevarán a canciones y videos relacionados con los cuadros y las esculturas interactivas aquí. Puedes descargar una aplicación para leer los codigos gratis en tu mobil.

1. A Thousand Things I'm Thinking Of; 2016
Escultura Interactiva
QR: *On Her List of Things To Do* [canta]
2. Skybelow; 2015, Digital Collage
QR: *SkyBelow* [video musica]
3. Malos Ojos; 2015, Digital Collage
QR: *SCAB* [canta]
4. Wide Open Spaces & Enclosed Spaces; 2017, Escultura Interactiva
QR: *Fear of Falling* [canta]
5. Apple Cider Viengar 2017, Mixed Media on Panel
QR: *Apple Cider Vinegar* [canta]
6. Magical Thinking; 2017, Mixed Media on Photo
QR: *Superstitious Girl* [canta]
7. Extrañas Notas / Strange Notes; 2017, Escultura Interactiva
QR: *Love Letters From Strangers* [canta]
8. Verse II With 8 Ravens; 2017
Mixed Media on Canvas
QR: *3 Dreams* [canta]
9. The Pattern of Your Words; 2017
Mixed Media on Canvas
QR: *Sledgehammers & Knitting Needles* [canta]
10. Verses I & III; 2017
Mixed Media on Panel
QR: *3 Dreams* [canta]
11. Love Letters From Strangers; 2017, Digital Collage
QR: *Love Letters From Strangers* [canta]

Milgracias a Josie McCoy, José Picazo y todos las artistas de Sporting Club; nuestros patrocinadores a Ruzavunol; y mi familia pequeña para su paciencia con mi locura.

fig. 92. gallery map, *Love Letters From Strangers / Strange Letters From Lovers*

Taking its name from the title of the last track of the album *Aldona's Daughter*, by the project *Stunt Lover* (discussed in the next chapter), *Love Letters From Strangers / Strange Letters From Lovers* is a multidisciplinary solo exhibition that was exhibited in February 2017. The exhibition consisted of five paintings, three digital prints, three sculptural installations, and QR codes that each linked to a song related to each work.

Almost all of the pieces were developed, in one way or another, from found, reclaimed and hacked objects and images. The paintings are mixed media, using decoupage, image transfers, and various paints and techniques. They are all produced on reclaimed canvases or wood panels, and the digital prints are each created from many, many layers in Photoshop of appropriated images, as well as personal photos. *SkyBelow*, which included personal x-ray photos, was already discussed in the previous section. Here, I focus on five of the pieces in particular: *Malos Ojos*, *Apple Cider Vinegar*, *Wide Open Spaces & Enclosed Places*, *Strange Letters From Lovers* [listed on the map as *Strange Notes*], and *Love Letters From Strangers*.

Printed and hung side by side with *SkyBelow*, *Malos Ojos* is created out of more than 80 Photoshop layers. It is related to the audio track, *SCAB* (It then went on to influence title of an experimental audiovisual project, *LOVES KNIVES*, which has ultimately been subsumed by the *Stunt Lover* project). Different copies were also exhibited in the Dublin *TransFusion* festival and the *Nasty Women* exhibitions in New York and San Diego in 2017 (Frank, 2017; Thompson, 2017).

The feeling of being in a new culture, where people are more prone to openly stare, the feeling of being transgender in public, is to feel completely

exposed and dissected by eyes piercing any privacy like knives. The shadowy ribcage is a clear nod to the x-ray used in *SkyBelow*. The image of the heart-as-target is fairly straightforward, arguably perhaps even generic, but together, they convey a physically palpable sense of exposure, a bodily sensation that the risk is real. There is a feeling that this is climax of a narrative, that this is the final stand-off; the breath is held anxiously, waiting to see if the barrage is indeed imminent or if the protagonist escapes unharmed.

As an image overall, it is reminiscent of the 2010 photo of Zackary Drucker taken by Manuel Vason (Fig. 35). For me, it was the first time exposing my body as a trans artist. I cannot speak for Drucker, but that decision to act, and to take the photo topless in that way, was an aesthetic decision, but also a political act of defiance, to face head-on the stress and social fear that added to the need to develop a persona that was able to go onstage and challenge that gaze, especially as magnified by an audience. There is also an implied challenge to the viewer, particularly in more conservative western cultures where female toplessness is taboo: Is this a male body, and therefore permissible as an image, or is it a female body, and therefore subject to censorship? When Rolling Stone published a follow-up article on Laura Jane Grace (Morris, 2016), and put her on cover topless, this was the same argument made by her ex-wife: that it misrepresented Laura Jane Grace's gender identity, because only "male" toplessness is acceptable in mass media (Murphy, 2016).



fig. 93. *Malos Ojos*, 2015

Taking its title from the song of the same name, in *Apple Cider Vinegar* there is again a preoccupation with the idea of “imperfect symmetry” that was introduced in *SkyBelow*. Two female forms flank a deific, floating lion’s head, similar to the layout of *WAKE* and essentially the opposite to *SkyBelow*. Although it maintains a center presence, its transparency and intentional dripping/bleeding into the background deter any reading of it as any more important an element, nor does it convey any importance as a starting point.



fig. 94. *Apple Cider Vinegar*, 2017

The girls and big cats are fairly mirrored in their presentation, but both left and right side each includes its own semi-symmetrical balance of imagery, both internally within its own “frame,” as well as across the vertical divide. The gasmasks and swallows in the upper right corner are both mirrored, but the birds also balance the bees on the right side while the gasmasks balance the gun and penis that are facing off against each other. The stylized image of the penis is superimposed on top of the cartoon figure; regardless of its affiliation or attachment, it is [always] in the foreground during engagement. The magnolia in the background on the left is repeated in the hair of the cartoon-drawn girl on the right. Textually, “Sweet” in a curvy font contradicts and

counterbalances the stenciled, militaristic-looking *AVISO* (“warning”) on the right- sweet and sour (or apple cider and vinegar, contradictory yet complimentary parts that make up the whole).

As a commentary on dating experiences as a trans lesbian, the piece presents a side-by-side comparison of the frustration and happiness, much like in any romantic relationship, but also illustrates the sense of familiarity and identification possible in a same-sex relationship. However, one is a three-dimensional, realistically painted form while the other is just an outline, a cartoon, a sign or a concept. Therein is exposed the day-to-day, crippling self-doubt that *can* often be induced by society; that the trans identity is somehow *less-than*, less *real* than a cis person, lacking something or merely emulating a counterpart.

Although it is a very different aesthetic than any of the precedents, this is perhaps similar to the importance of the urban environment in Ianna Book’s photos for *Trans Avenue* (Chpt. 4.3). The commonality and pervasiveness of those daily emotions in public is also represented by an aesthetic that suggests layers of graffiti on hoarding boards, a ubiquitous urban surface, evoked by the visible age and patina of the wood panel. Words and thoughts share the context of a lived space, on clear display yet so easily ignored. As a result of the practice, it is important because it is the first re-engagement with painting since 2005, encouraged and influenced by the *digital* collage exercises of *SkyBelow* and *Malos Ojos*.

Like *Social & Personal* that was discussed in the precedents, *Wide Open Spaces & Enclosed Places* is another monumentally-sized sculpture, approximately four meters in height, but this time interactive and multimedial.

The sculpture uses “gilded” scaffolding to support a motorized winch, from which hangs a double-headed beast. Once again are displayed the same plaster faces from *WAKE*, although this time they have been grafted, as if through some genetic editing, with discarded furniture and textiles.



fig. 105 Building and testing Wide Open Spaces & Enclosed Places

The piece is influenced by the lyrics it takes its name from, as well as the title of track from which they originate, *Fear of Falling*. And the piece holds true to its name, being at once spacious in the amount of empty area it creates for very few components, while being simultaneously bound and conscribed by the parameters of the scaffold.

The winch mounted at the top of the installation typically has a hanging hand-held controller on a cord. The “up” and “down” buttons usually found on the control were hacked and extended with wires down to a desk-like wooden control panel at the base of the sculpture. There, those wires were connected to two store-bought, motorized air fresheners that had been hacked as well; each one has a built-in timer, as well as an “emergency” button for instant “air-freshening.” One now functions as the “Up” button while the other controls the “Down” function.



fig. 96.

The circuit boards in the fresheners were removed and installed as sculptural elements, held in place by 3D printed autobiographical nude figurines that were then encased in glass domes. The “emergency” buttons were fixed in place on the wood control panel. In this way, audience members could personally control the up-and-down motion of the sculpture, but it would also move on its own due to the timers, which are set so that they take turns activating, ensuring that the beast remains more or less hanging in the middle of the available vertical space.

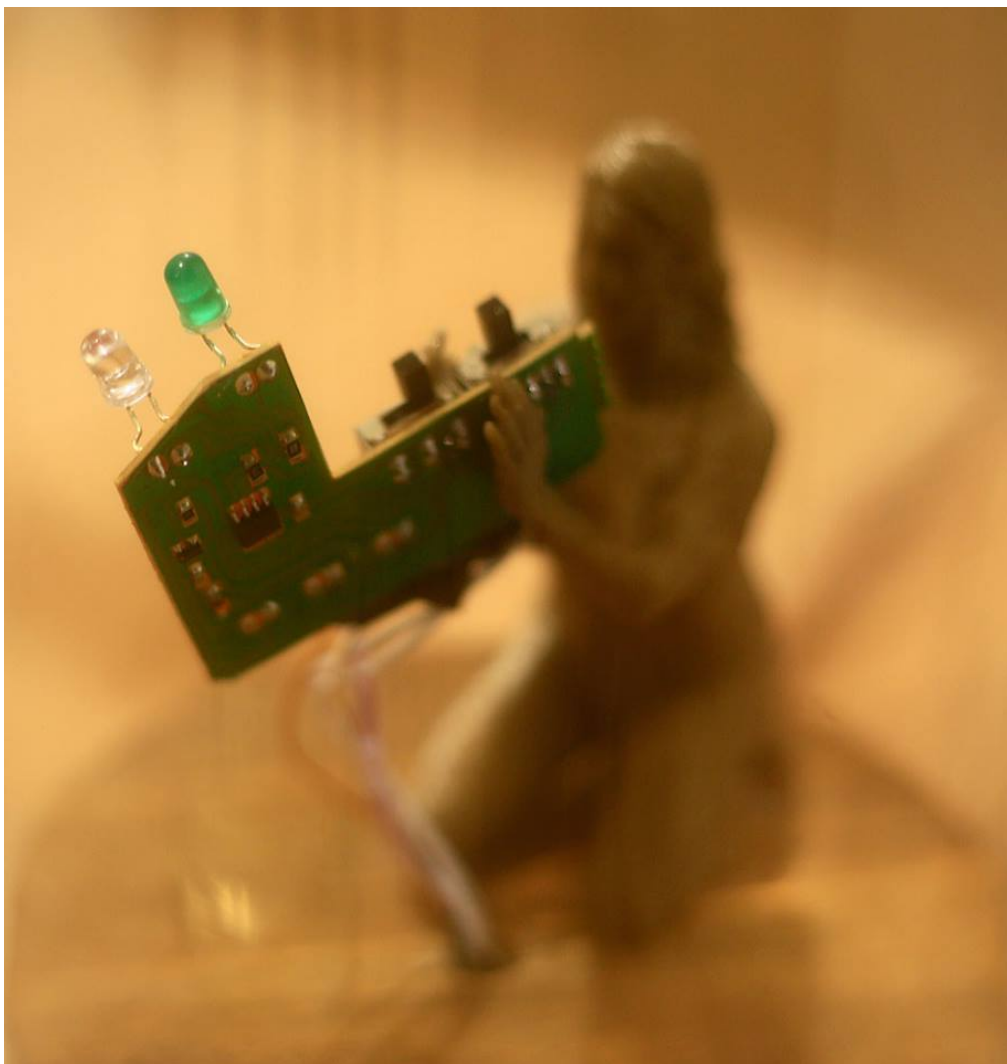


fig. 97. Hacked circuit boards from motorized air fresheners

There are a considerable number of elements to deconstruct in the piece, with a vast difference in scale of the various constituents, all of which have a distinct set of meanings and references to be unpacked. In that sense, the installation is almost as much of a collection of separate works, each presenting its own narrative, as it is a coherent whole. Similar to the wall of junk in *WAKE*, the closer you look, the more detail you see.

So, starting at the most granular level, within the glass domes that act as the new “*trans-mitters*” of instructions, the circuit boards with their LEDS and wires are held by two small figurines. They are easy enough to dismiss as just that, but upon closer inspection it is quite easy to determine that they are autobiographical, transgender nude figures. Although they are kneeling (and very small- barely ten centimeters high), as a finite project in and of themselves, the process is extremely similar to the naked body of trans artist Juliana Huxtable, 3D-printed by artist Frank Benson (Sargent, 2015). Like the Drucker photo, it is also another example of a “convergent evolution” of aesthetics, as I had no knowledge of Benson’s piece prior to development.



fig. 98. *Juliana*, 2015, c. Frank Benson.



fig. 99. 3D printed autobiographical sculpture.

The nudity of the subject in (either) work is extremely relevant. To have a naked sculpture or painting of a male or female is normal in the arts, if not elevated and lauded. The trans body, however, is usually naked for pornographic or fetishistic reasons, and therefore considered taboo and obscene. Yet paradoxically, As David Getsy notes, there is a social demand that trans bodies must be announced, must be visible and on display (Getsy, 2015a). The same sort of demands and expectations are placed on trans art- that it is a commentary on sex and gender, or some autobiographical documentary on transitioning. Presenting the trans body naked, during the photographic process

as well as for public presentation, is in itself a socio-political action, that is pregnant with the possibility of violence or other repercussions.

The kneeling position the figurines has a sense of religious or spiritual dogmatic ritual about it, genuflecting like supplicants, with their hands out, ready to hold some divine object- which, in this case, is the “brains” and control of the whole installation. The bronze-metallic color of the sculpture material also lends to this reading, while also resembling and referencing the tiny metal components of the circuit boards they hold, and matching the aesthetics of the sprayed-gold “emergency air freshener” buttons and scaffold.

The scaffold is a gilded cage for the animal within- a two-headed, semi-symmetrical beast that is a chimera of human, animal and furniture elements- brain, body and environment become one. The two now-familiar plaster faces are adorned with horns fashioned from the legs of discarded furniture; the legs are organic-looking, but gloss white, and folded deer-like and tapering into little golden hooves. The body is plush, and covered with antique textiles covered in a golden pattern, cinched in the middle with a tough, coarse hemp rope that hooks it to the winch above.

What is the significance of this recurring imperfect, semi-symmetry that has shown up in the 2D designs, and now in this sculpture? In some fashion or another it is definitely a commentary on the knowledge of, and from, the body. Biologically speaking, symmetry is typically an indicator of health of an organism.⁴² Asymmetry is usually a sign of past injury or trauma, so these images are conveying their own flaws, accumulated over a supposed lifespan. It can also be read as the self-reflexivity of a body, both figuratively speaking and

⁴² Comparatively speaking, there are *very* few species that show a genetic intention for asymmetry, the most popular probably being the fiddler crab, although it features in various species of fish, reptiles, birds and even mammals (Columbia University, 2012).

the literal act of looking in a mirror, which is a longstanding trope of transgender objectification in cisgender-produced media; it can be interpreted as a visual allegory for the “doubled” transgender gaze (Keegan, 2016 p29). So this “imperfect symmetry” has apparently been added, somewhat unconsciously, into my visual lexicon of a trans embodied experience.



fig. 100. *Wide Open Spaces* on display, Bologna.

Continuing an embodied apprehension of the piece, there is a visceral *knowing* of the feeling of the rope cinched around the waist, the constraining tightness and weight of body pulling down on itself. The wrinkles in the fabric and the angle built into the form to allow it to hang, “pinched”-like, from the center point

of the rope. There is a relatable sense of being *within* an enclosure, and it is virtually impossible for a human eye *not* to follow the motion, and mirror neurons *not* empathetically fire. It is a reaction to *knowing* the feeling of gravity on the internal organs when a body rises up, and the feeling of acceleration as it drops, and the jarring disequilibrium felt at a sudden stop. In the movement of the beast is experienced the bodily locus of metaphors.



fig. 101. Closeup of plaster cast, *Wide Open Spaces*.

This is also the first production in which a sort of hybridization appears. Although it may visually have derived from the same aesthetic as collage, it is a little more intentional as a lexical experiment within the visual language of the practice than the accidental idea of “imperfect symmetry.” The question arose while researching embodied cognition: what would it *look* like? How would it be possible to visually represent the transcendent actuality of consciousness as a

Mind, operating inextricably from within a Body, operating inextricably from within an Environment? Perhaps most interesting, conceptually speaking, is what would it look like if it goes *wrong*? What if, like glitch art, the flaw became the feature; what if all the ingredients were put together but came out as some strange hybrid, like a *Brundle-Fly*?⁴³ I present the answer to that question in Chapter 7.

Love Letters From Strangers is a digital collage based on a series of autobiographical photos. It was also used as the imagery for the show poster (and the cover of this thesis).



fig. 102. *Love Letters From Strangers*

⁴³ Goldblum's character, scientist Seth Brundle, tries out his newly invented teleportation device, but a fly sneaks into the pod. The machine doesn't know to "read" the two as separate DNA sequences, and so just mashes them together. Hilarity ensues. Just kidding, it goes horrifically wrong, and he calls himself, as his own new creation, a Brundle-Fly [Cornfeld, S. (Producer), & Cronenberg, D. (Director). (1986). *The Fly*. United States: 20th Century Fox.]

The other objects and images present are subtle references to the other pieces that are part of this exhibit, and this series of projects overall - for example, the magnolia and cougar's head are elements in *Apple Cider Vinegar*. There is also the panther that is used in the in the image of *SkyBelow*, and elements from other paintings that were in exhibition. The glitched collage combines and juxtaposes the background elements- the environment- with the subject. The symmetry is again imperfect, as if a mirror was reflecting an image from moments ago or about to happen. In a pose similar to Huxtable's 3D-printed sculpture, the image is itself a political action by presenting the naked trans body. But by also allowing a clear look of unease, uncertainty or trepidation to be expressed, it is a declaration of ownership of the narrative of the trans body; it is a "positive reclamation of vulnerability" (Baldino, 2015 p169).

Glitched imagery has become a staple aesthetic of postmedia design, which should not be surprising given the relationship as discussed in Chapter 2. It evokes the jumpy channels of early television, the degradation of photos by copiers and faxes, and digital files that have been hopelessly corrupted- as our lives are increasingly digital, it is a representation of reality- and the body- with which we are intimately familiar and comfortable. However, the glitch aesthetic is more than a mere nod to New Media Art; at least in this instance, it purposefully deconstructs the body, breaks it down, simultaneously erases and repeats it, offends and transgresses the borders of what should be an autonomous self from its context.

Interestingly, while researching other postmedia trans artists, a Tumblr page was discovered that was full of posts of glitched trans porn imagery, both "gifs" and still images. It would be a an easy argument to make that, as an artistic

and socio-political exercise, the glitching of the images problematized the fetishization and sexualization of the trans body, rendered their objectification to a point of *ad absurdum*; however, the profile is anonymous, and attempts at messaging the owner of the site were met with silence, so it is impossible to determine whether the creator is themselves trans, or just creating a new fetish subtype while still perpetuating the existing paradigm regarding trans bodies (Transglitch.tumblr.com, 2018).

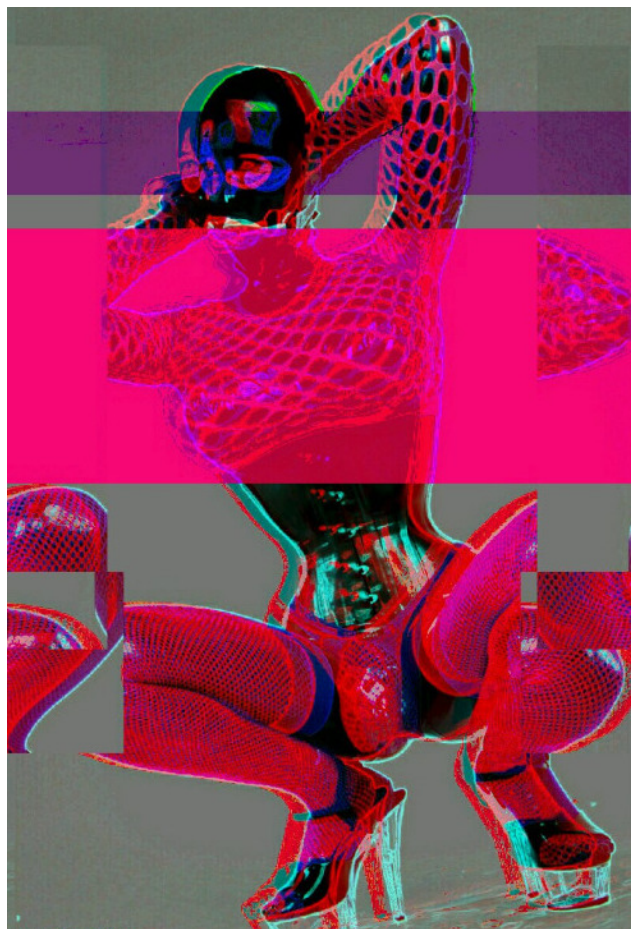


fig. 103. "Transglitch" porn.

The other half of the exhibition title, *Strange Letters From Lovers*, is used for an interactive sonic installation, comprised of a replica pistol, a string from

an upright bass, a pickup mic [a surface-adhered tiny microphone] and a guitar amp.

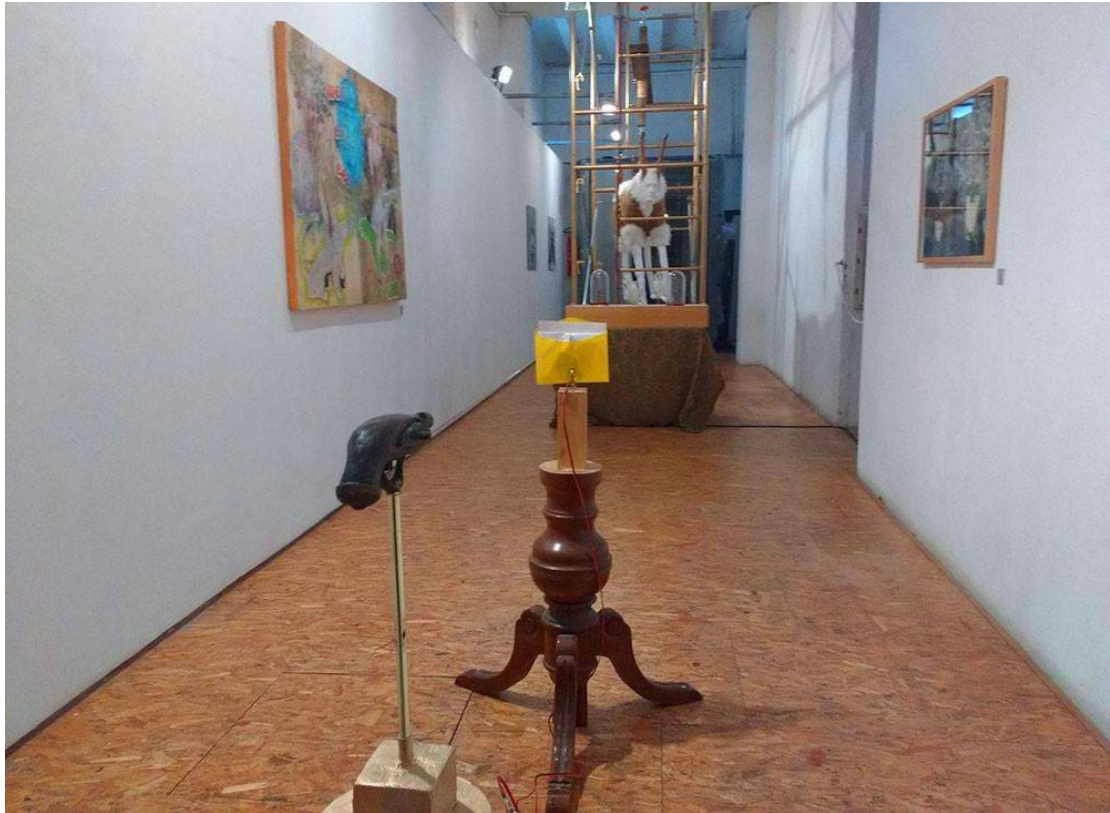


fig. 104. Strange Letters from Lovers, installation shot.

The pistol and pickup mic (hidden within a *yellow envelope*) are each secured to the end of the bass string, which is strung taught between the two matching wooden stands that are bolted in place. Footsteps, vibrations, and audience members playing the string are all turned into reverberated, warped sounds that echo through the gallery. The yellow envelope was already explained to be a direct visual reference to the relationship that was the catalyst for this series of projects (Chapter 6.1). The VIP invitations to the show were

sent in identical yellow envelopes, so that even unknowingly, the recipients were complicit in the intent and meaning-making of the project .

As a sound art piece, the reference to correspondence between two people proposes a discursive narrative for the interactivity of the piece, which along with the manipulation and repurposing of electronics, is similar to Frigon's work (Chpt 4.6) although the aesthetic is considerably different. As old-fashioned as receiving a handwritten letter might seem, the design of the installation also resembles a common trope in media, of an old-fashioned trap, like a string tied to a box propped up with a carrot dangling inside. The gun, tied to the other end of the trip wire, clearly illustrates the dangerous nature of the emotional connection, and the threat of what could happen by removing and reading the letter.

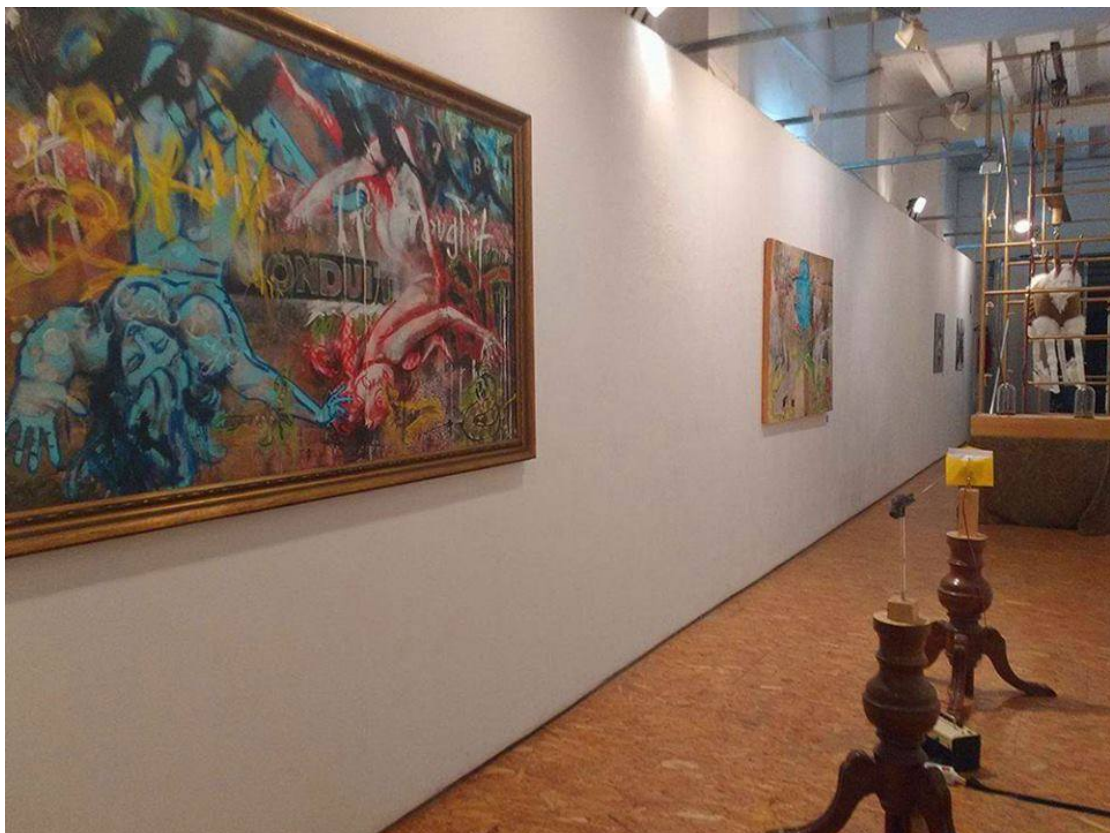


fig. 105. Strange Letters from Lovers. Sporting Club Gallery. 2017.

6.3 Stunt Lover (and the release of *Aldona's Daughter* - 22/09/17)

ANYONE CAN BE PUSSY RIOT (Alyokhina, 2017).



fig. 106. Cover art for the 2017 album by Stunt Lover, *Aldona's Daughter*

Kaylee Bear is the kind of girl I'd bring home to my mother... if my mom was Dorothy Parker.

- Max Cannon, creator of syndicated comic *Red Meat*

This is the creation of a persona capable of public performance. Even without a visibly different alter ego or stage name (the full of Kaylee Bear, rather than just “Kay”), the intent remains the same: let certain dominant personality traits of the identity take a back seat and allow others to come to the forefront temporarily. It is play- roleplay- but also serious, in its efforts and effects. It is an act of situating a trans body in a position of dominance within a public arena, just like Huxtable’s DJ sets (Chpt 4.7), Aguhar’s close-proximity performances (4.1) and Bond’s occupation of storefront windows (4.2). In this instance, it is ostensibly for the presentation of trans narratives in the guise of songs, presented under the name Stunt Lover. However, Stunt Lover is *absolutely* not “just a band,” but quintessentially an audiovisual narrative project and ongoing performance series. As a trans narrative, its success is as dependent upon the visual elements and persona performance as it is upon the audio tracks- graphic design and show poster imagery, videos, photography and online presence, merchandise and viral public imagery. As a method of reinforcing the persona, visual imagery of the trans character is used to help an audience understand how to engage the onstage act (i.e. “This is the singer of a punk band”). That, in turn, affects the performance experience, thereby creating a positive-reinforcement feedback loop.



fig. 107. Stunt Lover, by Fitch Photography



fig. 108. Stunt Lover by Fitch Photography



fig. 109. Stunt Lover is a Trouble Maker, by Fitch Photography

The “lineup,” or members of the “band,” is secondary to the actual act of performing, and changes as needs and availability dictate. The ethos and aesthetic of Stunt Lover are no different than the previous projects; in fact, the music production is autodidactic and developed from that same orientation as a visual narrator, not as a traditionally trained musician.

Working with Kay as an artist is definitely an intriguing experience. Her approach to writing/playing is quite unique and it differs from the “traditional.” Beside her amazing ability to tell a story, well thought-through lyrics where every emotion has its place get even more meaning because of the way she listens to

the music, and the musicians she is surrounded by have to respond to all that together. While the vast majority of artists would take a fairly personal or protective approach, sort of an, “I already made up my mind” approach, Kay tends to think “outside of the box,” leaving plenty of room for spontaneity. I would call that “an upgrade of emotional flow” for each song, which results in something more unique and enjoyable for everyone included.

- San Peric, studio producer of *Aldona’s Daughter*



fig. 110. San Peric, Alberto “Animal” Soldati, Kaylee Bear.

The tracks were recorded, mixed and mastered in-house by contributors to the project and myself, as was the CD packaging and design, which was finally released in September 2017 as *Aldona’s Daughter*. Besides the fact that the Stunt Lover project has resulted in numerous performances, video documentation,

registered songs and a physical album, its success can also be objectively critiqued by public response.

[...] among the most essential, smart, unforgettable music I've heard in the past 10 years. - Jonathan Negus of *Jaded Apes*

Dublin based band Stunt Lover is probably the most honest and heavy thing you will hear today. Kaylee Bear's voice is terrifyingly sincere and intense, bringing to memory Swans and [Nick] Cave's early years with The Birthday Party. - *Eclectic Magazine UK, 2016*

In debut album 'Aldona's Daughter', Dublin-based, trans-fronted punk trio Stunt Lover...have crafted an uncompromisingly sincere and intense document. Sonically, Stunt Lover favour buzz-saw guitars and driving rhythms, topped off with Kaylee Bear's impassioned howl... - *Golden Plec, 2018*



fig. 111.. Stunt Lover on bandcamp.com



fig. 112. packaging design and imagery

The name *Stunt Lover* was developed along the same process as the titles for the exhibitions and individual works, intentional in ambiguity and providing multiple readings or interpretations. This state of a subject being neither/both in its label is another example of the postmedia/trans capacity for multiplicity. The unique poster imagery created for each performance plays with sexuality, gender roles and ambiguity of form. The same attention is given to visual narrativity as the previous visual art works, and they are similarly “constructed” using found images from the internet, that are then corrupted and assembled. All the poster imagery and logos include internal references to the other work in the greater arc of the project- gas masks, wings and space girls.



fig. 113.



fig. 114. Sticker spotted on car in California.



figs. 115 & 116. Stunt Lover logo designs on T-shirts.

In order to emphasize the poeticism and visual narrativity of these results, and to focus on this text as an action itself, I break from the orthodox research document format and experiment with presenting the track lyrics and show posters in contemporary media layout, with discussion about the processes of their development, the narrative behind them or the significance of certain elements.

The problem, once again, is not too little meaning but too many meanings; meaning always threatens to run out of control in endless dissemination (Taylor, 1997 pp208-209).

Aldona's Daughter – Track List

1. Sledgehammers & Knitting Needles; 4:15
2. SCAB; 4:18
3. Fear of Falling; 3:43
4. 3 Dreams; 5:30
5. SkyBelow; 5:03
6. On Her list of Things To Do; 3:14
7. Apple Cider Vinegar; 5:06
8. Superstitious Girl; 3:36
9. Love Letters From Strangers / Strange Letters From lovers; 4:06

Sledgehammers & Knitting Needles

You've got your knitting needles and I've got my sledgehammer / you get judgmental and I get a stammer when I'm nervous / I get a stammer when I'm nervous.

You're just a bit of string in my pocket keep appearing / you don't want me but won't let me forget so I'm always hearing your name / to you it's just another wordgame

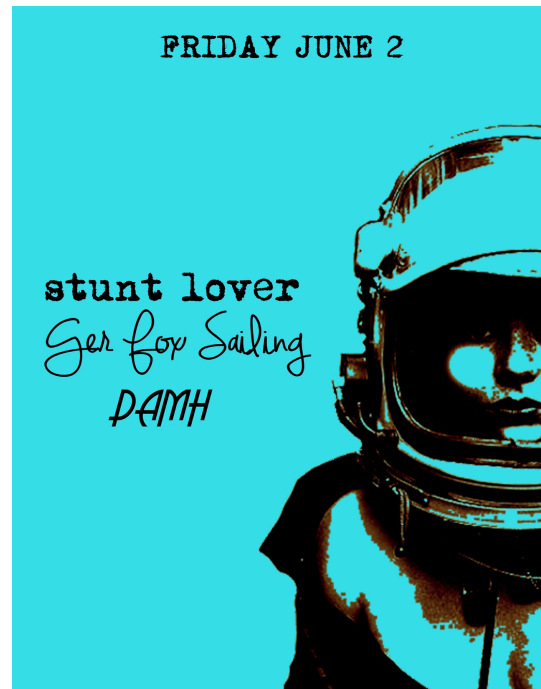
You've stitched up all the loose ends, unravelled all my self esteem / you're nailing brass tacks in my coffin, I'm walking hammered down your street / I'm hammered. Drinking to forget- I'm fucking hammered.

You've got your knitting needles and I've got my sledgehammer / you still sleep alone as if it never mattered, that first kiss / did you deconstruct that first kiss? Do you forget that first kiss?

The pattern of your words is tattered, let's carve them instead out of stone / you're building up your fortress walls, no windows look into your throne / you've got quotes on acetate sheets instead windows / flimsy words instead of real soul

This incomplete letter that we started and then never sent / a psychic hiccup interrupting hand-written notes I self addressed and enveloped / return to sender all these yellow envelopes

You've got your knitting needles and I've got my sledgehammer / you still sleep alone as if it never mattered, that first kiss / did you deconstruct that first kiss? Do you forget that first kiss? / You've got your knitting needles and I've got my sledgehammer / you get judgmental and I get a stammer when I'm nervous / I get a stammer when I'm nervous



TIVOLI BACKSTAGE - FRANCIS STREET - DOORS OPEN 9PM - FREE IN
FB:STUNTLOVERMUSIC

fig. 117.

When considering the gender[ing] of objects or technology (McGaw, 2003, p17), sledgehammers and knitting needles are a pretty clear binary. The lyrics are visually descriptive, and make yet another reference to the relationship that acted as the catalyst, vis-à-vis the yellow envelopes. The performance of the song reinforces the stammer that is mentioned at the beginning and end of the song, a verbal analog to the imperfect symmetry used in the visual vocabulary of the practice.

SCAB

I will be- I will be the hard skin on your bended knees / I will protect you like an insect shell outgrown after a week / then you can genuflect in front of every figurehead that you happen to meet / your soft warm pink parts are safe behind my heart, it only get harder as I bleed / your soft parts are safe in me / I only get harder as I bleed

But you keep picking at / yeah you keep picking at / yeah you keep picking at the wound

Don't throw away the water with the baby, it's the same mistake your mother always made / the skin and the bandage, so hard to disengage, they grow together with blood and age / it's getting hard to disengage / who am I without you anyway?

But you keep picking at / yeah you keep picking at / yeah you keep picking at the wound

I will be- I will be the hard skin on your bended knees / I will protect you like an insect shell outgrown after a week / your soft warm pink parts are safe behind my heart, I only get harder as I bleed / your soft parts are safe in me / who am I without you anyway?



These lyrics and the imagery for *Malos Ojos* were developed concurrently; various ideas were tried and discarded for a digital collage as well as a video-images of insects like cicadas and dragonflies molting out of their shells. Ultimately the idea of “scab” was associated to “scar,” which led to “cuts,” resulting in the array of knives taking aim.

fig. 118

Fear of Falling

Wide open spaces or enclosed places, I don't feel good anywhere / don't want to go don't want to do anything if you're not there / I feel this paranoia and I hear these voices when you're not around / I need you- to calm me out and bring me down

But I've got no fear of falling, no fear of falling- no fear of falling in love with you

I get nervous in crowds, I jump at loud noises on the street / it's not that I hate people, it's just all these goddamned strangers I gotta meet / I'm scared of being outed, I distrust the cops, somebody could knock me out / could catch a disease, o god I need some pills please / Woody Allen would be proud

But I've got no fear of falling, no fear of falling- no fear of falling in love with you

I'm scared of relationships, oceans and sinking ships / your blue waters drag me down / Yeah maybe I'm drowning but Dovi it's sounding like you're never coming back around

But I've got no fear of falling, no fear of falling- no fear of falling in love with you



SABADO 1 JULIO 2017 - 23:00
ZZ PUB, MÁLAGA

FB: stuntlovermusic
UNIVERSITAT POLITÈCNICA DE VALÈNCIA

fig. 119.

The show poster above is the first appearance of the Stunt Lover gasmask logo, as part of a series of performances in Spain in Summer 2017.

The lyrics convey the anxiety felt in public for various and sundry reasons, with explicit reference to a trans identity being “outed” (even the audience doesn’t pick up on the reference. The first verse provides the title for the interactive sculpture, Wide Open Spaces & Enclosed Places, which creates a similar sort of social anxiety as it creaks and lurches up and then falls.

3 Dreams

I told her a story about a dream I had last night / I was standing waist-deep in cerulean tides / yes maybe I'm ungrounded, but baby I feel fine / got a body full of water and a big ocean mind / and the water was a conduit / it was in me as I sank in it

Then I told her a story of a dream in the desert heat / there were eight ravens crying as they were flying over me / they said, 'Hey there sinner in the sand, don't you understand that you can't go East? / You're searching for salvation but you will only find disease.' / and the sky was a conduit / it was in me as I fell through it

Then I told her a story of a dream I had again / I was standing at a funeral, holding hands with my twin / she's a sisters I never could've missed 'cuz she never has been / she's my anima or shadow or whatever lies within / and the earth was a conduit / it was in me as I laid in it

*The water was a conduit; The sky was a conduit; The earth was a conduit.
But fire- fire only burns; My hand reaches out but my mind never learns.*



The song verses are written, quite literally, about three dreams had at various auspicious points in time. The third in particular refers to “standing at a funeral holding hands with my twin,” who is a sister. I in fact had recurring dreams about a twin, to the point where I had to ask my mother if there was something she hadn’t told me. In hindsight, the dream-sign is rather clear in its message.

fig. 120.

SkyBelow

You're so whole, you're so complete / bet you find all that you seek / tell me what that's like to be / tell me lies I can believe / You're the strangest angel that I've ever seen / you look like a devil dancing in my dreams / get me behind thee / I need no Revelation to see

Sometimes I thinking about what my father thinks of me / or the time your mother said, "this phase will pass naturally." / My brother knows how to fight a war / doesn't even know what a brother's for / yours, I'll never know who he is / is he married, does he have kids?

So step with me to edge of the world / an outside boy and an inside girl / My earth shook for SkyBelow / erase my name because I'll never go / to Lithuania

Sometimes I look in the mirror that you hold up to me and I disappear / I know I fucked it all up when I took a head full of stupid fears and typed them in

So step with me to the edge of the world / and outside boy and an inside girl / the ice was thick over the phone / burn the ticket, 'cause I'll never go / to Lithuania

You're the strangest angel that I've ever seen / you look like the devil dancing in my dreams / my earth shook for SkyBelow / erase my name 'cause I'll never go / to Lithuania



fig. 121.

This is the narrative that was developed and reiterated through so many media- digital collage, video and audio track. The lyrics are pointedly autobiographical, referencing the too-common family issues that arise for trans people, as well as the specific trans/lesbian dating experience.

Like the rest of the poster art, the one above features a female/femme subject in a questionably sexual or fetishistic presentation. These characters are avatars for the performance persona.

On Her List of Things to Do

she loves her indie movies but I already
know the plot, I've seen it before / but if
you want to go then hell, let's go
together / we'll sneak some drinks in
and sit way up in row four

promise not to ask me how it ends, I
promise not to tell you / we'll sit there
holding hands and watch the story play
out like it has a thousand times before

Maybe you'll let your fingers linger on
my arm a little too long like you do when
nobody's there / and we could talk a
little closer in the dark and you would
know that nobody would notice how
much you really care

promise not to ask me how it ends, I
promise not to tell you / we'll sit there
holding hands and watch the story play
out like it has a thousand times before

she loves her indie movies but I already
know the plot, I've seen it before / but
promise not to ask me how it ends, I
promise not to tell you / we'll sit there
holding hands and watch the story play
out like it has a thousand times before

[Kay] has this unconventional approach to writing music, no overthinking, just go-with-the-flow sort of thing. One time she brought in this music [she had] written to fit the lyrics for a song called On Her List Of Things To Do; It was written in such a way that every 7th beat was being played in 7/8 tempo signature while everything else was in 4/4 and it seemed to be really off-beat and hard to follow. So we tried to turn the song into a somewhat more convenient pop form in several ways, but nothing managed to work as well. At the end, after listening back to all the potential variations, we concluded that if we just adapted and followed the original tempo, it would actually serve the song in a perfect way and give it a soft but needed subtle twist somewhere in the middle where nobody expects it. It turned out to be one of our favourite songs to play and, in my opinion, one of the best on the album.

-San Peric, studio producer of
Aldona's Daughter

Apple Cider Vinegar

I wish your suitcase had bust wide open and that strange little jar you packed had broken and the apple cider vinegar inside had soaked into your knit clothes / that way everybody walking past maybe going somewhere sunnier would leave this town knowing that same bad taste you left inside my throat.

I wish I would've turned around on Dame Street when you came home early and you asked to meet so your winter words would be received while you were wearing your summer clothes / that way everybody walking past hand in hand would see you waiting and see you standing there, just like you left me all alone

I wish you would've fallen to your knees when you heard "Turn Me On" at Button Factory... fallen into the dirt and beer and stained your jeans, 'cause for you I wore my pretty clothes / that way everybody drinking and dancing around would see you suffocate and see you drown in shame for all the shit you let go down while they listened to CocoRosie

But I'll get up, get posi, it's a beautiful day / don't ever let this town drag you down that way / what's the story, did I lose the plot? / do you love me a little, do you like me a lot?

Get up, get posi it's a beautiful day [repeat x 3]



fig. 122.

This is possibly the most cynical of all the tracks. Like *3 Dreams*, each verse presents a separate vignette, that when presented together provide a narrative arc of events in the relationship. The wording is designed to evoke strong sensory responses: the acrid smell of vinegar; the contrast of “wintery” or icy words with summery days; the smell, familiar to anyone who has worked at a venue, of stale beer, dirt and cigarettes left behind at the end of the night.

Superstitious Girl

Magpies in the churchyard Saturday morning holding mass, caw-calling out salvation to all us sinners that walk past / and shoes have been left on the corner, just more victims from last night / their tongues cut out, their soles are broke but they put up quite a fight / this is what the world has to offer as I'm passing by / plastic bags do pirouettes just like you and I as we're dancing around the subject, making eyes across the table / we both know what we want to say and know we are not able / our fingers meet a moment but that's all that we can do / think I'll have another drink, think you should have one too / go ahead / it's on me / I don't mind / I'll do whatever it takes just to make you make some time

Now I know you never were a superstitious girl / I've suffered all your questions and your theoretic worlds / some folks call this true love, others call it fate / but if we want the answers have to hurry up and wait / it's gonna take a little time and authenticity but darling those are two things that you never have to beg from me / you're a bull with stormy eyes hiding in a lion's den / and you're drowning dragons in the oceans of your fountain pen / so let's put the voodoo dolls and love potions on the shelf / with a little patience think we'll work this out ourselves / we're dancing around each other like particles through space / and stars shone a million years ago to light your face just tonight / next to mine / and I'm trying / to do whatever it takes just to make you change your mind

The process by which this track was developed was accidental, almost embarrassingly so, as it was written and recorded in such an inebriated state that it was impossible to recall what effects or methods were used on the various elements of the track. It is also unusual in its format, in that it does not have a chorus distinct from the two verses; it is essentially all-narrative without many of the common features of typical song-writing.



fig. 123.

In this poster art are several internal references to previous elements of the project, a process which has been an ongoing feature in the practice. The female protagonist has the feline head from *SkyBelow* and *Apple Cider Vinegar*; the figure in the background wears the gasmask, and holds a bird, symbolizing the recurring wings. Upon close inspection, the photo on the front page of the newspaper is the promotional bathtub image taken by Fitch Photography.

Love Letters From Strangers / Strange Letters From Lovers

She wrote me a letter. This is what it said:

The other day you told me / you felt you won the lottery / moved by your words to share something as well, so here goes / I remember once talking about my hesitancy for any kind of serious relationship, already back then I always saw myself as very independent, self-sufficient and complete / at the same time I had this inner knowing -not a belief or a hope, but a knowing. Not a belief or a hope, but a knowing, a certainty, that there is something magnificent waiting for me / I have to be patient, I've got to be patient and get ready

As I watched you / running / down that hallway / I found myself / thinking / there goes the woman I love

*Now don't get me wrong, I never believed in an 'only love' in one's life, but always in liberating, empowering and inspiring love, and that's what I feel since the day I met you / no idea I could be so passionate, so spontaneous and affectionate / and it you think I'm spoiling you with the things I say, well, the words I use do not adequately convey how much I admire you, and though I do miss you there is firm calmness and knowing inside me / knowing our love and respect, our admiration and acceptance is mutual and sincere / I love you and I thank you for being here in my life / always yours
At the end of the letter she wrote, "always yours"*

As I watched you / running / down that hallway / I found myself / thinking / there goes the woman I love

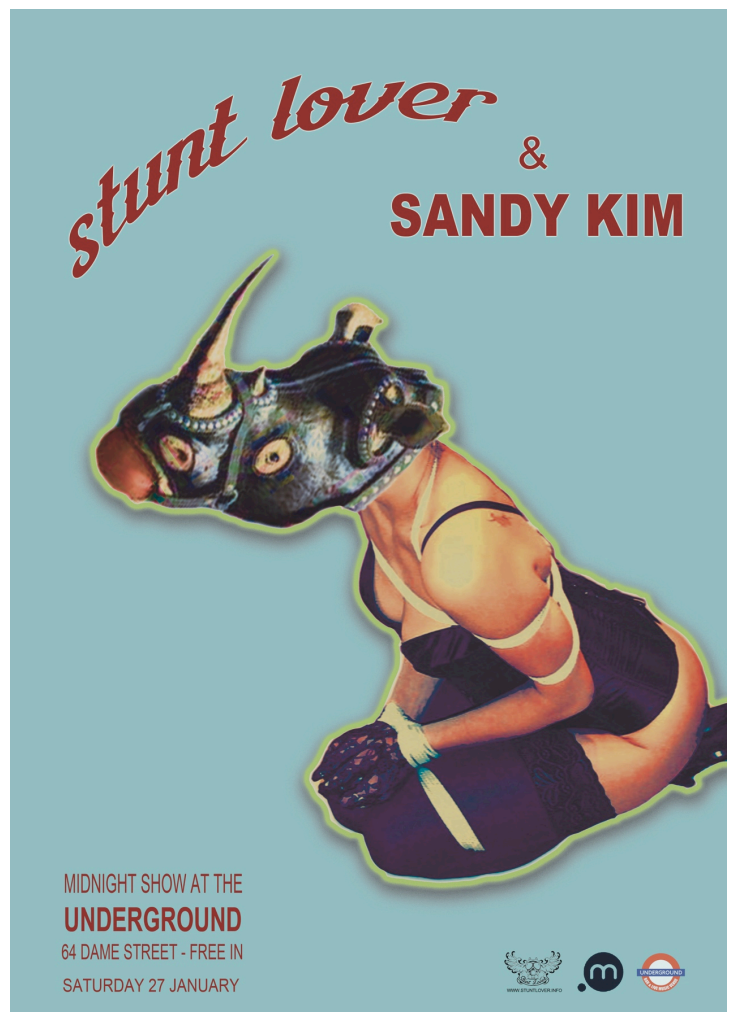


fig. 124.

The order of the tracks on the album took a great deal of deliberation, not only so that there was an overall narrative, but on a more practical level that there was a natural flow. The final track is upbeat and references the beginning of the relationship experience, with the receipt of the first yellow envelope. The contents of the letter provide the lyrics for the track. After the process of catharsis, it seemed to be the appropriate end to such a project.

The scope and enormity of this multi-faceted, multimedia project should not be underestimated. By allowing the cathartic process to run a natural course, like a fever, *Aldona's Daughter* became a four-year long project of intricately related, reflexive explorations and productions. The only project similar in scope reviewed in the precedents is perhaps Cassils' ongoing presentations of various iterations of *Making an Image* (Chpt. 4.4). Certain elements do have contextual framing, like the poster art of Stunt Lover and Juliana Huxtable (Chpt. 4.7), and the performance aspect that is shared through virtually all the precedents.

As a narrative of a lived trans experience, it is poignantly, if not painfully autobiographical, providing numerous points of entry and engagement into a trans orientation. However, not only is the subjective knowledge presented unique, but the reflexivity of so many various endeavors, referencing each other and the underlying motivation, has resulted in the gestalt of a novel relationship between a great number of publicly available and reviewable tangible results. Although only a selection has been presented here, the exhaustive body of work produced includes two narrative videos, four documentary videos, sixteen live performances, five paintings, three digital prints, three sculptural installations, and physical and online versions of a copyrighted album consisting of nine ISRC-registered, critically reviewed audio tracks.

I have attempted to present a deep dive into each constituent of *Aldona's Daughter* as a balance between reflexivity and granular descriptive analysis. The objective visual analysis provides a conceptual object to apprehend and compare, which has illustrated that there is a continual referential iteration of visual objects as memes between each constituent. This is as an ongoing

reflexivity inherent in the process of production. As a result of the reflective subjective analysis, I can state that there is a arc of personal development to the narrative that stretches from the previous works to the results of *Aldona's Daughter*. From the *WAKE* installation to the performances as *Stunt Lover*, there is a discernable development from the original transitional point (Chpt. 5.1), to an acceptance and inquiry into the nature of trans identity (5.2), to operation from that orientation. Regarding that processional development and bearing in mind the shared elements of the precedential practices, I suggest that the most interesting and efficacious course of action and development for the Stunt Lover project is to further develop the visual elements of onstage performance. The positive feedback loop affecting the persona (Chpt 6.3), and the personal development evidenced through the chronology of production, suggest that a predominantly solo, more visually narrative live stage performance is both a possible, and a *positive*, direction in which the project can evolve. A current frame of reference and current subject material four years on from the original source also provide numerous opportunities for creative exploration.

I have also noted in what ways the results are both similar to the contextual field of precedents, and how the practice uniquely *differs* in its representation of an authentic trans lived experience. At the completion of such an exhaustive four-year project, what is of interest *now* is to see if and how these processes, themes and developments, both shared and unique, continue to manifest in the subsequent results of the practice researched here.

Chapter 7: XOXO



fig. 125. Otilia Pelvya, from Family Triptych.

The four years' duration and development of *Aldona's Daughter* as a project was a significant period of development for the processes and themes of this creative practice, but as should be expected, also saw dramatic changes in

the external environment, experiences and life situation which inform the practice. As is evident from the discussion regarding embodied cognition, any significant change to the environment can be expected to produce a change in consciousness.

Most notably, another successive identity was adopted, that of “spouse,” and my wife became not just a life partner, but a creative advisor and contributor. Collaboration is a decidedly new process for this creative practice, the effect of which is discussed in this chapter- particularly the effect on the curatorial process that guided the exhibition production. I also analyze several key works from the exhibition, XOXO, and finally reflect on the question previously posed about experimenting with visual representation of embodied cognition (Chpt. 6.2).

Following is the show poster and text, which was presented in Spanish and English, and explains the *double entendre* behind the title (which ought be a recognizable feature of the practice by this point).

XOXO

CONSTRUCCIÓN Y DECONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA FEMINIDAD

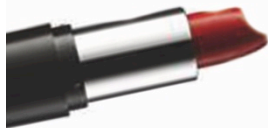


ANDREA BROTONS

KAYLEE BEAR KOSS

OTILIA PELYVA

INAUGURACIÓN 20:00h, 14/09/18



SPORTING CLUB RUSSAFA
C. SEVILLA 5, VALENCIA

fig. 126. XOXO show poster

XOXO: Construction and Deconstruction of the Feminine

Group Show of Andrea Brotons, Kaylee Bear Koss, Otilia Pelyva

14/09/2018-01/10/2018

Sporting Club Russafa, Valencia, Spain

Show Text [translated from Spanish]:

XOXO: Four very interesting letters. In English, "X-O-X-O" is a way that (typically) girls or women end a letter, meaning "Hugs and Kisses." In Spanish [at least in the Valencian region], it has a very, very different meaning [pronounced "cho-cho," it is slang for "vagina"]. Although this can, and has, lead to uncomfortable cross-cultural misunderstandings, it also illustrates how people can interpret the same information differently.

This exhibition offers a particular vision of each one of the three participating female artists of STANDARD Gallery and Studios, in which the concerns of each of them are evident. Based partly on experiences, during childhood and in times of conflict, and the processes of admission and healing, various media like painting, sculpture, photography and video are used to illustrate the struggles that women experience and fight to overcome: being different, being limited in opportunity, being objectified and oppressed. Even painful experiences help shape us, and they become the challenges we must face to finally accept ourselves as beautifully imperfect women.

Certain pieces in this exhibition deal with extremely personal and intimate themes around childhood and the role or opinion of one sex or another. Some content is probably all too familiar for many women: an alcoholic father; a sexually abusive

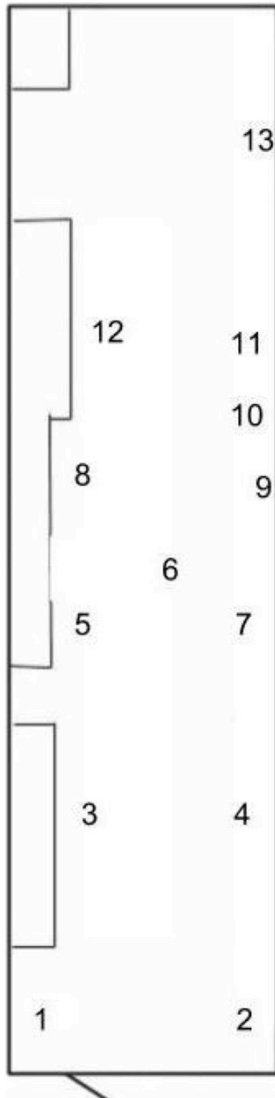
brother; a mother who looks the other way or who perpetuates a separatist and disrespectful education.

The process of objectification is a denigration of a subject to a mere thing. It happens too often: by others, by society and even against ourselves. It is the appropriation or abnegation of authorship, to allow the apprehension of a person as just a set of shapes, curves and colors, like a car or furniture, or other attributes that reduce them to the same background value as animals or objects. This project questions that process of "objectification."

JOINT WORK:

The joint piece by Otilia Pelyva and Andrea Brotons explores a childhood desire to be a boy (by binding the breasts and cutting their hair), emulating the men that were allowed to do whatever they wanted while the women were seen as second class servants. The series of photos between Pelyva and Kaylee Bear Koss celebrates the results of the slow process of work towards personal resolution, self-acceptance and happiness. The work of Andrea Brotons with Koss illustrates the fractured and fragmented results of a chauvinist environment on a female body, inevitably rendering a subject as nothing more than a collection of objects and forms.

XOXO:
Construcción y Deconstrucción de la Feminidad
 Sporting Club, Russafa
 14/09/2018



1. *Party Tit*, Kaylee Bear Koss
2. *Calladita*, Andrea Brotons
3. *Trapos Sucios*, una colaboración de Andrea Brotons, KBK and Otilia Pelyva
4. *Karma Miranda*, KBK
5. *Desire / El Deseo*, una colaboración de Andrea Brotons and Otilia Pelyva
 - a. *Desire*
 - b. *Cuerpos Fósiles, Torso I*
6. *Hybrid Maternity / Maternidad híbrida*, KBK
7. *Tríptico de la Familia*, una colaboración de KBK y Otilia Pelyva
 - a. *Petardo*
 - b. *Afterparty Pieta*
 - c. *Trofeos*
8. *Sentadita*, Andrea Brotons
9. *Akkor is...*, Otilia Pelyva
10. *Törött alapok*, Otilia Pelyva
11. *Emlékek*, Otilia Pelyva
12. *Mujer Retrato*, Andrea Brotons
13. *Identidades multiples*, una colaboración de Andrea Brotons y KBK

Comisariado por
 Andrea Brotons y Kaylee Bear Koss

Mil Gracias a Sporting Club y:



www.standard-art.org

fig. 127 gallery map



fig. 128. Installation shot of *XOXO*.

Curation is in no way a process new to the precedents of this creative practice. However, rather than a (predominantly) masculine sense of competition or autocratic selection and dictation, this exhibition was developed according to a more feminine-oriented action of cooperation and collaboration. Besides pieces selected for inclusion by each artist, there is one collaboration between each two women, as well as a final installation that was designed by all three: *Dirty Laundry*, which at once evokes a “female”-gendered job of “doing the wash” as well as the seemingly universal feminine notion of gossip (both Spanish and English have a euphemism of “airing dirty laundry” to imply talking about private matters in public). The idea was discussed, deliberated and agreed upon collectively by the three participating artists.



fig. 129. *Trapos Sucios* (Dirty Laundry)

As the catalyst and supporting framework for the project, an extendable clothes drying rack was mounted on the gallery wall. Each artist was then issued an identical white t-shirt, to use (or not) in any way they saw fit. The results were fair representations of the three distinct practices: Andrea Brotons, who works with paper mache and molded body parts, created a female torso that hung from two meat hooks. Otilia Pelyva, a photographer, printed a manipulated image onto the shirt. As a reference (or possibly homage) to the previous digital collage *Malos Ojos* (fig. 93, p207), the final piece is a bricolage of assembled objects and stenciled graffiti.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Although they weren't discussed in Chapter 6.2, *Love Letters From Strangers*, several of the paintings in the exhibit used and re-used handmade stencils of knives, fighter planes and other images evocative of the "danger" that a "Stunt Lover" might employ. Or enjoy.



fig. 130. What Artist.

This time, though, rather than the stares and comments directed towards a trans body in public, the daggers being thrown refer to the critiques and criticism, both real and imaginary, externally and personally, at an artist or art

practice. The reflexive repetition of an array of daggers now points to a proxy for the autobiographical photograph- a desiccated and preserved baby bird, finished in gold and ensconced in a gold box, resting on a red background upon which is printed, *qualis artifex pereo*, which loosely translated means, “what manner of artist dies with me?”⁴⁵



fig. 131.

It is interesting to note, autobiographically, that there is a reclamation of identity as more than just an object of the social Gaze; the replacement of the heart in the exposed chest for something else can be interpreted as an indicator that many insecurities have slowly re-aligned or re-associated themselves with

⁴⁵ Two things here. Firstly, the gilding is yet another reflexive nod to the theme best exemplified in the piece *Wide Open Spaces and Enclosed Places*, as discussed [exhaustively, I am told] in Chapter 6.2. Secondly, the Latin quote is attributed to the Emperor Nero, he of Rome-burning fame, who fancied himself quite an *artiste*. (Ehrlich, E., 1985 p235)

more familiar, comfortable identities, such as “artist.” The protective barrier of rhino skin between self and environment has perhaps started growing back.

As part of the curatorial and collaborative process with my partner, Otilia Pelyva and I developed the text and aesthetic that she wanted to present as part of the exhibition, *Törött Alapok*. The video monologue was incredibly candid, almost emotionally exhausting. In that, it was reminiscent of Aguhar’s brutal honesty (Chpt. 4.1). Personally, I feel that the video, like Aguhar’s work, offers a challenge this practice: to strip away the protective layers of wordplay and aesthetic, cut through the fat and really expose the bones and nerves. Although the history is not part of my narrative, the decision of how to share it was made within a trans/queer relationship and as part of an arts practice.



fig. 132. *Emlékek* [photo] & *Törött Alapok*. [video]. c. Otilia Pelyva.

Taking its name from a popular internet and social meme, *Party Tit* is playfully composed of a set of 500cc silicon breast implants housed within two glass bell jars; one has a rotating disco light situated underneath so that the coloured lights shine and refract through the translucent gel.⁴⁶



fig. 133. Party Tit.

Besides being yet another reminder of the deconstruction of the female form into mere objects and shapes, to the point where non-biological elements are seen as feminine.

⁴⁶ The original phrase, “Calm your tits,” meaning “Chill out” or just calm down, gave rise to the notion that maybe a girl should leave one of them not-calm, and hence that is her “party tit” (imgur.com, 2015).



fig. 134. Party Tit close up.

The consistency of the piece also reflects a recurring interest in biological transformation, futurism, cyborgism and the exposure of internal things and interior states, blurring the boundaries between the figurative and the literal.⁴⁷ Like the beats-per-minute of a song, the rotating party lights also create a rhythm that creates a visceral feeling of elation. That is possibly reflective of the joy that can come with positive body transformation.

⁴⁷ Also, if I could actually install disco lights in my breast implants, I totally would. I don't think I'm alone in that.

As per the design of the exhibition, *Family Portrait Triptych* is a collaboration with one of the other artists, Otilia Pelyva. As a celebration of what could perhaps be described as “alternative” or transgressive familial femininity, this project includes two self portraits as well as a, sort of, analog “.gif;” an animated light box with a revolving “party light” that recreates the imagery of the Pietà.



fig. 135. Family Portrait Triptych.



fig. 136. *Afterparty Pietà*

The self-portrait, *Trophies (Trofeos)* is a stark visualization of the weight and effects of the socially-prevalent Gaze, the denigration of status to nothing more than another object in a collection, a “notch in the belt,” or something to be looked at, studied, critiqued and possibly ridiculed. Like the previously discussed *Malos Ojos*, it also references the lived experience of being trans in a foreign culture that seems to revel in, or at least casually accommodate, openly

staring at people regardless of how uncomfortable it might make the subject-as-object. This elevates a sense of paranoia and claustrophobia that is closely associated with a personal sense of a trans body operating and moving through a social environment. Objectification is an erasure of agency.



fig. 137 Trophies

In Chapter 6.2 I introduced the question that came to me while considering embodied cognition, about how it might be visually represented. The question included an intrinsic invitation to answer it experimentally. As part of the process, I started by considering the environment, the most easily observable element. Anthropomorphism is endemic (or else there wouldn't be a word for it), and is basically a conflation of elements of the environment with the human body.⁴⁸ Cars, architecture and sculpture all get attributed human (very often female) characteristics, which is why it is possible to "read" gender in them (Getsy, 2015a). This also happens with furniture, when talking about the graceful curve of something like a chair leg, for example, or the stubbornness of a drawer. Furniture is, as matter of form following function, human-scaled, and intimate elements of our cultural environment, so it was the most likely candidate for experimentation. Additionally, as a feature of my own environment at the time, I found Valencia to be truly unique in the staggering amount of furniture that the residents leave out on the streets for collection. Obviously, there is already an exhaustively noted use of discarded and appropriated objects in this creative practice, so this was a particularly functional serendipity.

So, as there is a natural predisposition for humans to attribute human, or at least living characteristics, to nonliving objects in their environment, if there is a continued conflation of the environment, the bodies in the environment, the minds that occupy them, and the minds that are witnessing it, what sort of queer, transgressive representations of consciousness are possible?

⁴⁸ It is also the attribution of human characteristics to animals, but for the sake of this argument I am focusing on inanimate objects that are components of an environment.



fig. 138. *Hybrid Maternity*

The mixed-media, part-readymade assemblage of *Hybrid Maternity* transforms a discarded end table and various other objects into a simulacrum of a deer-like cervidae. The book placed on top is another discarded item, *Girls' Own Stories*. Inside the drawer is the body of a babydoll, painted gloss white and devoid of details.

Besides the reference to comparisons made between women and deer, gazelles or other “leggy,” “graceful” animals, this composition also highlights the social expectations of feminine interests, that girls and young ladies should be playing with dolls and emulating maternity and maternal attitudes.



figs. 139 & 140. Additional angles of Hybrid Maternity.

In reviewing the tangible results of Chapter 7, it is important to reflect on subjective knowledge embodied within. During the Chapter 6 review, I noted that there was a developmental arc evident in the chronology of work. Reflecting on *XOXO*, it is apparent that arc of gender identity development expressed throughout the practice has continued its trajectory (Burdge, 2013 pp53-54). The processes and productions of *XOXO* indicate an integration of identity and shift in focus to post-transitional issues: issues of being an artist, being a woman, of being a wife and partner in a family. I posit that this validates the authenticity of the creative practice as a trans narrative, as lived experience is not static.

The new collaborative processes and transfeminine influences introduced during this project have found a fit with the existing characteristics of the creative practice, maintaining a balance in multimedia presence, building upon existing aesthetics and further developing new vocabulary within the particular “language” of the practice (Candy & Edmonds, 2018 p67). In particular, the concept I originally referred to as “hybridization.” Reflecting further upon the intention of the process, a better label might be “consciousness conflation.”

Although not part of the *XOXO* exhibition, the process and line of inquiry of “consciousness conflation” continued to be developed in the “butchered” carcass of the upholstered makeup bench that makes up *Abundance*.⁴⁹ The use of furniture and fabrics can also be read as a newly developing gendered aspect of the practice. Their manipulation and this “conflation” confer a *transcendence* or *transgression* of the binary that might otherwise be implied or reinforced.

⁴⁹ From the 2018 exhibition, *Superávit* (standard-art.org, 2018).



Fig. 141. Abundance

Like the attribution of human characteristics to animals in anthropomorphism, or pareidolia (finding familiar patterns like faces in random images or scenery), this could be defined as zoomorphism: the application of animalistic qualities to static objects. In its apprehension, it flattens, queers and transgresses the hierarchy and distinction between humans, animals and the

environment; a blurring and queering of the mind-body-environment paradigm that is integral to consciousness. The last example to illustrate this is the sculptural installation, *Rodeo*.



fig. 142. Rodeo

It conveys the consciousness of an animal onto an environmental element (a footstool), but it also replicates the same sort of tension, a potential energy transitioning into kinetic energy, that can be bodily understood and known.

Considering the entirety of Part III, *Transeverythingism*, I have presented a selection of results from the practice that are not just new contributions themselves, but are also representative of new subjective knowledge gained from a unique and authentic narrative of a trans lived experience. I have attempted to be consistent in presenting a trans orientation from which to apprehend these events, complimented with a granular visual analysis so that the physical productions can be understood as best possible.

The results have been squarely situated in a context of their precedents. Many similarities were identified, as well as features and aesthetics unique to the practice. Besides the shared postmedia characteristics, other recurrent themes were noted. *Gilding* occurs frequently, and can be interpreted as a metaphor for makeup and wardrobe, or the hiding of the body. *Blood* has been used as a surrogate for political debate over *identity*. And perhaps the most robust and recurrent elements are *Imperfect Symmetry* and, lacking a better name at this time, “consciousness conflation,” the visual blurring or blending of Subject & Object, of Body & Environment. Within this practice, both are continuous dialogues and metaphors for embodiment and nonduality.

CONCLUSION

In the Introduction, I introduced the hypothesis and objectives of this research. I explained that the research proposed to explore transgender lived experience through the creative practice, and the new contributions to the field produced. It was also hypothesised that transgender and postmedia experiences share certain fundamental characteristics.

One of the three objectives was to develop a contextual background for the field of practice. To that end, Part I developed the historical, contextual and philosophical *situating concepts*. Chapter 1 provided the sociopolitical and historical background and standing of the trans community in the west, the progress made, and threats that still exist. Chapter 2 discussed the concept of a postmedia period, its relationship to, and effects on trans identities. It was argued that access to online social networks, and other media production and publishing technologies accelerated the progress of trans visibility. I also contended that trans narratives and cultural production are important areas of research because postmedia experience is fundamentally transgender, as posited in the hypothesis. Finally, Chapter 3 introduced the scientific theory of Embodied Cognition, which stresses the generally accepted model of cognition, or consciousness, as being not some metaphysical 'Mind' that thinks and operates in an ideal and perfect condition apart from the body or environment, but rather that all thinking functions, from basic to abstract, are developed up from metaphors built upon the actions and forces of a body engaging its

environment; that the species-specific constellation of sensory organs, physiological formation and bodily processes (or body schema) necessarily shape and determine the way in which the world is apprehended by that consciousness. Personal experience, differentiation and nuanced identity (body image) further inform the interpretation of the environment, which then argues for the value of subjective reporting, such as is undertaken in phenomenological methods. Whereas a queer phenomenology might present a pathway to understanding the emotional/subjective state of being socially or culturally different or “other,” a Trans* Phenomenology arguably extends that opportunity for understanding to identities who are psycho-physically, physiologically “other” and therefore apprehend and interpret environmental conditions in a far different manner than a “control set” of the general, cisgender and able-bodied population. Like Ahmed’s queer counterpart, Trans* Phenomenology can be practically applied to problematize standard “readings” of socio-cultural narratives, events and objects, and expand the set of orientations from which such an event can be viewed and interpreted. Embodied Cognition perfectly informs and continues development on previously existing texts on Trans* Phenomenology.

A second objective was to locate this creative practice within the proper field by examining *precedents of practice*, which includes a selection of other artists as well as foundational work in the personal practice. During the review of the practices and work in Part II, care was given to identify and explain the recurring and shared themes, motivations, perspectives, aesthetics and lines of inquiry present and shared by the case studies. These common characteristics provided a contextual framework in which to better apprehend and comprehend the motivations, aesthetics and methodology of the creative practice being

researched. As themes presented themselves in the analysis, it was shown that these are many of the same characteristics that describe postmedia experience.

In Part III, as informed and situated by both Parts I and II, the results and processes of the creative practice were researched, as per the third objective. A deep dive consisting of descriptive analysis and subjective reflection was undertaken on both the tangible and qualitative contributions to the field that were produced.

Given all of the above, when considering the field within which the practice is situated, I have confirmed that there are indeed characteristics, concerns and features that are integral to both the field and the creative practice situated within, just as much as there are differences and features unique to the practice and its results.

In the precedents reviewed, there is evidence of Multiplicity and Successive States. There is multiplicity of forms and platforms, as well as of identities or roles (like in Diego Marchante's ID project, or the various onstage characters of many of the other artists). Various works, Like Cassils' clay sculpture *Making an Image*, continuously take on new iterations of presentation and publication. This is akin to a photo or video being reproduced for various formats or resolutions, or multiple personalities or publication channels used by an online individual (e.g., separate YouTube channels for distinct interests or topics).

Related to Successive States are Malleability, and Transformation as an Ongoing Process (or state of being). These concepts are most notable in Cassils' clay performance/sculpture and photo documentation, and Frigon's body

manipulations. In postmedia production, these concepts are evident in glitch art and online “vlogs” or video diaries.

Technology, Futurism and/or fantasy inferences and influences are prevalent throughout many transgender narratives. Much of this includes concepts of cyborgism or chimaerism- the desire for agency, the ability to control, alter or change the body narrative. Examples of this theme were noted in the works of Raphaëlle Frigon, Juliana Huxtable and the Stunt Lover project.⁵⁰ It is mirrored by the disembodied state of online identities in general.

There is a recurring fascination with the Visibility of the Invisible. This can refer to actual physiological elements, like blood, bones and semen, or subjective, intangible and metaphoric states of being or experienced emotions. It can also be manifested as the exposure of hidden social engagements or events. For example, the online dating messages sent in Ianna Book’s *OK Lucid* (mentioned in the footnotes), or the violence perpetrated against trans people exposed in Cassils’ *The Resilience of the 20%*. In another sense, visibility is a constant issue for postmedia cultural producers, as the production or publication of content in no way guarantees exposure to an audience, given the unfathomably enormous volume of competing data available to even the most niche audience.

Performativity is used as a means of authority and embodied agency. The presence of the trans body and narration by a trans identity reclaims authorship over the personal narrative, which can then be expressed in an authentic fashion. This is evident in the performative narratives of Aguhar, Huxtable, Bond and Cassils.

⁵⁰ Interestingly, what is often evident is references to the Star Wars mythos. This can likely be attributed to the average age and generation to which many of the artists belong, and the ubiquity of the franchise at the time of any childhood escapism and gendered role-playing.

Regarding the gestalt of the creative practice researched, it presents a unique trans narrative as knowable and understandable, as a trajectory of gendered identity development from early stages in the foundation work, continuing all the way through to the final projects discussed. The analysis of the situated practice illustrates the importance of authorship and agency in the presentation of a trans narrative, and of presenting the trans body in public space, as a transgressive political action of reclamation, visibility and validation. The importance that ‘performance’ would have to this practice was unknown initially; it was only uncovered during and as a result of the ongoing practical research.

Additional new knowledge was developed regarding the processes of the practice, and how those processes changed during the course of the research. Some processes, such as the reflexive iterations of visual and textual elements in subsequent and concurrent productions, are evident even in the foundation work reviewed in the precedents of Part II. Other processes are newly emergent, as environmental changes during the four years affected the cognitive priorities responsible for the practice. The research evidences an increasingly collaborative methodology, within both the production and curatorial processes. Also evident is experimentation and new developments in the narrative vocabulary. These are elements that signify a concept unique to the “language” of this particular trans postmedia practice, like “imperfect symmetry” and “consciousness conflation.”

The particular projects reviewed resulted in a plethora of novel contributions to the field. The *numerous* unique cultural events and objects are already described in (perhaps exhaustive) detail. As tangible or sensorial results

of the research, they were all presented publicly for review and critique. Introduced into the sphere of general knowledge were digital and painted 2D images, videos, interactive sculptural installations, public exhibitions, posters and viral merchandise, online audio tracks and a physical, packaged album.

I contend that the most critically significant result, however, was that of a persona capable of live (and documented) performances. This proves to be an intersection of personal and public knowledge. By locating a trans body in the center of attention on a stage, a trans orientation from which to apprehend the event is publicly offered, and acceptance of that invitation is almost inevitable, whether there is audience awareness or not. It is a subversion of the traditional narrative. It is a transgression of the traditional use of space. Lyrics sung by a trans voice tend to queer and problematize any cisgender reading, either hetero- or homosexual.

That is the publicly available knowledge; the personal effect gained was, I believe, an informed acceleration of the cathartic and developmental processes that were taking place in, and as a result of, the practice. As such a monumental intersection between the social and personal, I contend that the performed audio-visual narrative most clearly supports the hypothesized exploration of a lived trans narrative.

At that intersection of public and personal effects, there were unforeseen secondary results. At almost *every* performance, there was an audience member who made a point of mentioning, either to someone from our contingent or to me personally, that they had never met a trans person in real life before. These interactions were overwhelmingly positive in nature. Additionally, the majority of followers of the project on social media platforms are unique followers-

previously unknown people that either attended a performance, read a review, or were in some way introduced to the project online.

In reviewing the objectives and the research results, there is nothing that I have been able to identify which could be considered a concern left unanswered. Evidence has been presented to argue that the objectives have been successfully met. The publicly available, tangible and qualitative contributions to the field and the new knowledge produced through the practice have been detailed and documented. The only questions that remain to be answered, then, is what to do with these results and what are the recommendations or considerations for the practice following this research.

The importance of performance has already been identified several times now; experimentation could be undertaken to develop the performance along several parameters.

The practice and performance can benefit from exploration of technologies and methods to facilitate a more robust solo onstage performance, with minimal diminishment of stage “presence.” By this I mean exploring technical options, rather than devolving the production from a full-band sound to something more akin to a singer-songwriter presentation. There are several reasons why this is a practical avenue to explore; pragmatically, it is logistically easier to travel, and there are more and varied venues available for such a performance. That could provide the opportunity for possible inclusion of a more narrative, almost “spoken word” component to the performance that creates an integrated theatricality to the performance; that it becomes more so an event of the persona telling a story onstage through various media, rather than merely the performance of a set list of songs. This could be supported by development and integration of visual technologies (as an affinity for gadgetry

hacking is already evident from review of the practice). This could be the construction of costumes, onstage sound- interactive projections, or the physical presence and use of constructed sound devices. This could also include the development of further video narratives, that could benefit and include the painting and sculptural processes of the practice. This would then imply a more concerted promotional effort to publish results on a wider variety of platforms.

And although it might seem counter-intuitive to developing a more robust solo presentation, I would argue that whatever shape the practice takes, it can benefit from a continued dedication to the collaborative processes that have emerged during the research, whether that is onstage or behind the scenes, during the development process or the execution. I believe that going forward, the practice can also benefit from being more process-oriented, or process-interactive; being reflexively aware about the forces and influences on the production of whatever project during the period of its development.

The research and the practice over these past four years have produced a significant contribution to the field and a published body of new knowledge, which has already been acknowledged and detailed, but it should be noted that it includes this very thesis. Like the performances, this writing exists as a public and political act. The discussion of an arts practice that presents a lived trans narrative is itself the insertion of that trans voice into the public sphere. As mentioned in the preface, there is an avalanche of views and opinions from cisgender, nontrans public actors that are desperate to pathologize, medicalize or otherwise weigh in on the realities facing trans people. Even when those opinions or statements are from trans allies or supporters, to some degree it works against the visibility and autonomy of a trans person in representing their own authentic self and their own narrative. Therefore, the act of publicly

presenting this thesis, in and of itself but also as the documentation of the overall research, is a defiant statement of visibility. It is part of the reclamation and declaration of authorship of an authentic trans narrative, and as can be considered an equally important production of the very practice that it has informed and documented. That relationship is illustrative of the circular feedback loop of reflexivity: the process of researching the practice affects the production, and simultaneously the body of work produced both affects and includes the research.

ANNEXES

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Glossary of Terms

Audiovisual Narrative:

Although as a term it is very much the sum of its parts, an audiovisual narrative also has several transcendent or emergent properties. As a practice it builds upon the rules of linguistic narratives, which also inform traditional visual arts “narratives” such as “reading” a painting from top-left across and down to the bottom-right. These existing narratives “rules” also translate into, or inform and shape, photography and, later on, videography and cinematography. For the purposes of this investigation, we are adopting a very broad interpretation, in order to understand audiovisual narratives as arts practices that utilize, translate or transmit content and intent via multiple and various traditional and electronic/contemporary/emergent media [see postmedia]. Also referred to as “transmedial,”⁵¹ this means that now “stories can be told making use of distinct and multiple forms of expressions” (Bateman, 2016).

Augmented Reality:

The best way to describe A.R. is that –as opposed to an entirely artificial environment like Virtual Reality, or V.R.- it is like a transparent layer laid over the physical environment. Many phone apps already do this, with for example google map pins popping up for coffee shops as you scan your phone’s camera down the street [or whatever you are searching for]; or a game where fictional characters are superimposed over the geography. Google Glass and other similar products promise[d] a more intimate version of this, with information displayed on the lens directly over whatever is in line of sight. Like VR, AR has been somewhat dismissed simply because some of the earliest attempts may have left

⁵¹ There is even the “Institute of Transmedial Textuality Research” at Bremen University in Germany.

users somewhat wanting. However, both challenge and question the nature of a singular embodied consciousness.

Cis, Cisgender:

If someone can be transgender, then what is the alternative? Cisgender refers to people whose gender identity matches their assigned sex. Coined by sexologist Volkmar Sigusch in 1991, It is a relatively newly term (en.wikipedia.org, 2018c). The reason being is, until you notice something, there's no need to name it. Much like someone with functioning legs never noticing the congested path to their house until they wind up in a wheel chair, someone whose gender and sex match probably never even stops to question that their mind actually *has* a gender. It can also refer to someone who “performs” the gender role that is congruent with their perceived sex.



fig. 143. What Cisgender Means. Youtube.

Dead Name:

The name given at birth, if a trans person has adopted a new name during their transition. Media outlets, authorities and unsupportive families will often refer to a trans person by their “dead name,” which makes identifying hate crimes against trans people more difficult; they can also be used to “out” a trans person, either accidentally or maliciously.

Embodied Cognition:

As simply as possible, this is the idea that conscious thought, regardless of how complex or abstract, fundamentally derives from the body's interactions with its environment. The *nature* of the body necessarily affects the interpretation of the environment, and consequently the operating metaphors that the organism [ostensibly the human] utilizes [unconsciously or otherwise] to develop abstracted concepts.

The idea that the nature of the body affects the nature of thought was first posited by Thomas Nagel, in a 1974 article entitled "*What Is it Like to Be a Bat?*"⁵² This was a thought experiment in which Nagel used to illustrate that the physicality of the body and its associated sensory organs filters how we interpret our environment. So for a bat, the world is interpreted very differently than by a human, based on scale, different sense organs like sonar, flight and so on. To a lesser degree, then, each human being even interprets the world differently, depending on their physical characteristics, quality or damage to sense organs, and however many other factors.

The way humans generically engage with their environment, though, leads to culturally universal metaphors that we use and understand with hardly thinking about- they are so engrained in our apprehension of the environment and events that we easily lose track of the fact that they are, in fact metaphors. This is an easy enough concept but can also get quite complex quite quickly. Some simple examples are directional: Up is good, progress; Down is bad, sad, poor performance. We also use metaphors of movement and physical characteristics: the future is *in front* of us, the past is *behind us*; She is *stretched* too thin at work, she might *snap*, her emotions are *fragile*. We understand movement such a linearity because of how we typically move through the environment over a period of time; we have a physical experience with actually feeling the stress put on something that is pulled, like taffy; we know the sharp explosion of energy when something like a rubberband breaks or snaps; we

⁵² (Nagel, 1974). This paper was reprinted in various formats and has been widely cited, most notably for this research by David Chalmers and Mark Johnson, both of whom are researchers in Philosophy of Mind. In particular, this research is greatly influenced and informed by Johnson's work and theories, which are put forward in his books and writing, most notably *The Meaning of the Body* (2007) and *Metaphors We Live By* (Johnson & Lakoff, 1980).

know fragile things like eggshells must be handled delicately or risk breaking them into countless pieces.

Gender (v. Sex):

The conflation of these two concepts is at the root of a great deal of the current fights and arguments for and against trans rights, if not the very reality of their identities. When people make claims like, “there are only two genders,” what they are actually referring to is sex: in the human species there are two biological sexes, male and female, yet even then this is not a static binary, and not everyone fits perfectly into one category or the other, as there are a number of attributes in addition to the rather reductionist view of the presence of a penis or vagina at birth determines the sex. Besides intersex individuals who exhibit physical properties of both or perhaps neither, there are also chromosomal abnormalities like Klinefelter’s Syndrome, which rather than the typical XY male arrangement, results in anything from XXY to XXXXY or possibly more (Ingleson, 2017). At the most drastic end of that spectrum, individuals can live their whole life assuming they are female unless they get a DNA test that identifies that overwhelmed Y chromosome. There are conditions that cause children born female to develop at puberty into males. So the point is that, whether you consider it a binary system or a continuum, Sex is of the body.

Gender, on the other hand, is of the mind, and its makeup is a bit more complicated as it is constructed of genetic, social and cultural elements. Although many people do, it is ridiculous to claim that gender is only and just a social construct, as trans children as young as four or five can exhibit traits of the opposite gender, despite all attempts by parents, teachers and others to push them towards the “correct” behaviours and pursuits, which would indicate that there is an innate, genetic, physiological component. But, it would also be incorrect to state that gender roles are absolute and determined by birth, as a massive amount of the roles, behaviours and attributes are ascribed to genders and vary from culture to culture; there are also various gender distinctions that exist in some cultures- most notably several East Asian societies and,

historically, many Native American tribes- that do not even exist in contemporary Western cultures.

So: Sex is biological/anatomical, and Gender is a socio-cultural set of behaviours [gender *roles*] and a subjective internal state of mind [gender *identity*].

Genderfluid:

In September 2016, “genderfluid” was one of 1,200 new words added to the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines it as,

(a) (in early use) not clearly or wholly male or female; androgynous; (b) designating a person who does not identify with a single fixed gender; of or relating to a person having or expressing a fluid or unfixed gender identity (now the usual sense).

This fluidity or fixed nonbinary identity might be expressed through clothing (combining elements of both male and female attire, or wearing dresses one day and jeans and cowboy boots the next), interests, or affectations, or it might remain an internalized feeling or identity. Cross-dressers or transvestites are sometimes also considered genderfluid (Cronn-Mills, 2014). In its essence, it is the refusal and refutation of typical Western, rigidly prescribed binary gender roles and behaviours. Put another way by actress Ruby Rose,

Gender fluidity is not really feeling like you're at one end of the spectrum or the other. For the most part, I definitely don't identify as any gender. I'm not a guy; I don't really feel like a woman, but obviously I was born one. So, I'm somewhere in the middle, which – in my perfect imagination – is like having the best of both sexes. I have a lot of characteristics that would normally be present in a guy and then less that would be present in a woman. But then sometimes I'll put on a skirt – like today. (2014)

She illustrates this fluidity in her video, Break Free, which can be viewed by following the link attached to the QR code below.



fig. 144. Ruby Rose. Youtube.

New Media Art:

In his book *Media, New Media, Postmedia*, Domenico Quaranta states that New Media Art:

...does not identify an art genre or an art movement, and cannot be viewed- as it usually is- as a simple medium-based definition. On the contrary, a work of art – whether based on technology or not – is usually classed as New Media Art when it is produced, exhibited and discussed in a specific “art world,” the world of New Media Art. This art world came into being as a cultural niche in the sixties and Seventies, and became a bona fide art world in the eighties and Nineties, developing its own means of production and distribution, and cultivating an idea of “art” that is completely different from that entertained by the contemporary art world... today New Media Art no longer needs that specific “art world” which formed ... to respond to the challenges introduced by media not compatible with the contemporary art world. (Quaranta, 2011)

Passing:

When trans people are able to operate and interact in society, and be perceived by strangers and the general public as their identified gender. “Stealth” is passing without admitting or identifying as trans.

Postmedia:

Although sometimes used in different senses, it is generally understood that this refers to time and practices that exist since the 1960’s and within the period of digital and online media, and the technological advances that made them possible [see Moore’s Law]. The increasing ubiquity and falling prices of technology that at one time was available only to television stations, movie production companies and a handful of sufficiently well-off artists or individuals- i.e. videocameras- disrupted both the traditional classification of “mediums” [as for example, in art departments] and challenged the standing suppositions about the volume of editions and distribution of a work of art- digital prints or copies of a video, and even more so online/download availability used to be only for mass media, and considered antithetical to the commodification of “valued” individual or limited editions works of “fine art” (Manovich, 2001). Practically speaking, this means that with an explosion of tools and resources available, an artist no longer has to consider or constrain herself as a “painter,” “sculptor,” or “performance artist,” but can explore the transmission of intent through multiple or various channels, even combining and recombining elements to create new practices and/or methods of documentation.

Transgender:

Transgender, Trans*, Transvestite and Transsexual are often confused or conflated by the general public [as well as by people who ought to know better]. In western English, “Transvestite” has been largely phased out of use, most likely because of its negative connotations with the pejorative, “Tranny.” “Transgender” is an adjective that refers to people who in one manner or another do not associate solely with the gender they were prescribed and identified as at birth; its contemporary shorthand “Trans*” is used as a more generic umbrella or blanket to refer to a greater community of gender-nonconforming, transgender, nonbinary and genderqueer people:

Transgender, then, unlike transsexual is a multifaceted term. One example of a transgendered person might be a man who is attracted to women but also identifies as a cross-dresser. Other examples include people who consider themselves [sic] gender nonconforming, multigendered, androgynous, third gender, and two-spirit people. All of these definitions are inexact and vary from person to person, yet each of them includes a sense of blending or alternating the binary concepts of masculinity and femininity. Some people using these terms simply see the traditional concepts as restrictive. Less than one percent of all adults identify as transgender.

Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Sexual orientation, according to the American Psychological Association, refers to an individual’s enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Transgender people may be straight, bisexual, lesbian, gay, or asexual. Biological factors such as prenatal hormone levels, genetics, and early childhood experiences may all contribute to the development of a transgender identity, according to some researchers.

(Scutti, 2014)

Transgender (under its medical term “Gender Identity Disorder) was declassified as a medical disorder in 2012. The current diagnosis of “Gender Dysphoria” refers to the mental and emotional problems that arise *because of* the condition of incongruity between a person’s internally felt, and socially prescribed, genders, which is a very important distinction. For example, a trans person isn’t necessarily suicidal because she is trans; she might be suicidal because of the dysphoria and stress experienced from being discriminated against in issues of employment, housing, dating, and overall higher levels of violence and murder that are experience *because* she is trans.

Transsexual:

Technically speaking, a transsexual person is specifically someone who has transitioned to the other binary sex, which might include all or some legal, surgical, hormonal and socio-cultural steps or actions.

Vlog:

Video Blog. Somewhere between an online diary and a TV show.

Queer (v. Genderqueer):

Coming from a more traditional Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual history, queer typically refers to sexuality, embracing the “weird” or “whimsical” inherent meaning of “queer” to denote a “playing around with” –or queering- of sexuality. It should be noted that it is generally considered a distinct concept or identity from “gay” or homosexual; and as well that for some it is still considered a derogatory word,

whereas for others it has been “reclaimed” in a move of empowerment (Ziyad, 2016).

There is not a concrete wall between the two, as sexuality of course bleeds into gender identity and gender roles, but genderqueer would typically refer to the “playing around with” gender roles, and is related to genderfluidity. Personally, I would argue that genderqueer implies an intentional, disruptive act or pervasive attitude/ethos, whereas genderfluid implies a more innate, internally felt sense of self.

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