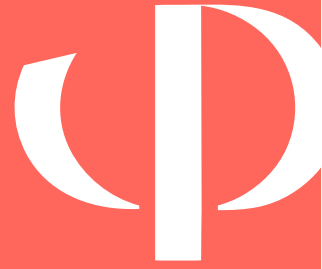


LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy



FALL 2018

VOLUME 18 | NUMBER 1

FROM THE EDITOR

Grayson Hunt

BOOK REVIEW

Alexis Shotwell: Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times

Reviewed by Ami Harbin

ARTICLES

Andrea Pitts

Embodied Thresholds of Sanctuary: Abolitionism and Trans Worldmaking

Perry Zurn

Puzzle Pieces: Shapes of Trans Curiosity

Tamsin Kimoto

Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, and Phenomenological Forays in Trans Life

CALL FOR PAPERS

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS



APA NEWSLETTER ON

LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy

GRAYSON HUNT, EDITOR

VOLUME 18 | NUMBER 1 | FALL 2018

FROM THE EDITOR

Grayson Hunt

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

I am honored to be the new editor of the *APA Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy*. This position reflects my shifting professional focus as the Program Coordinator and Lecturer for the newly launched LGBTQ Studies Program at the University of Texas at Austin. It is a great pleasure to be organizing, teaching, and researching in this field as a philosopher. This fall issue includes a book review by Ami Harbin of Alexis Shotwell's *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* as well as a cluster of essays on trans experience.

Harbin offers a timely review of Alexis Shotwell's latest book, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*. The review is organized around the concepts and practices that shape Shotwell's approach to ethics: constitutive impurity, interdependence, and world-making. One of the central queries that drives Shotwell's fifth chapter, "Practicing Freedom," is posed in two parts: "Is feeling like you can do whatever you want with your gender voluntarist? Or does this feeling itself shift the norms that constitute gender?" These questions get at the heart of the many debates within feminism and philosophy. For Shotwell, as for Foucault, "the conditions for freedom are thus set by the norms available or created in the context of struggling with the situation in which we live but which we have not chosen and cannot completely control." What I appreciate most about this book, and Harbin's thoughtful review, is how both contextualize the conditions out of which the transgender feminisms of Pitts, Zurn, and Kimoto are written. Transgender studies is, after all, the practice of freedom in compromised times. Rooted firmly within Black feminism, phenomenology, and existentialism, transgender philosophy exemplifies the task of world-making under oppressive conditions.

Against the backdrop of biopolitical containment techniques—such as institutionalized curiosity, bioethical standards, binary gender logic, and state-sanctioned "protections" in the form of sanctuary cities and gender-based asylum—all of which target trans people in particular, the essays explore resistant strategies of trans world-making. Whether that be the power of trans-specific curiosity, erotic embodiment, disjunctive gender becomings, or trans abolition, such strategies craft new affective landscapes and psycho-social economies.

Andrea Pitts, in "Embodied Thresholds of Sanctuary: Abolitionism and Trans Worldmaking," argues that sites of state-sponsored protection, such as sanctuary cities and gender-based asylum, entrench (rather than suspend) violence against trans and gender-nonconforming peoples. They do so by reifying state investments in upholding civic order by surveilling, constraining, and imprisoning people of color and other communities rendered "deviant" or "threatening" to national stability. Pitts offers a rich intersectional history of (im)migration and its attendant laws and its racialized, gendered, and ableist investments, and illustrates the carceral power of immigration with examples of how sanctuary and asylum actually reinforce the carceral logic that is at once anti-trans and anti-Black. Pitts concludes by exploring alternative tactics developed in trans-abolitionist praxis and discourse.

The trans subject is also centered in Perry Zurn's essay, "Puzzle Pieces: Shapes of Trans Curiosity." Zurn begins by granting that biopolitical structures and disciplinary practices institutionalize certain objectifying ways of seeing, investigating, and accounting for trans people, casting them as socio-epistemological problems. Trans people are not simply the objects of curiosity, however; they are also practitioners in their own right. Zurn argues that curiosity is a strategy of resistant world-making through which trans people foster the rich individual and social life denied them under current structures of governmentality.

Finally, Tamsin Kimoto's essay, "Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, and Phenomenological Forays in Trans Life," draws on the tools of phenomenology to describe two key experiences in the lives of many trans people: hormonal transition and transphobia. In attending to these experiences, Kimoto aims to reorient our understanding of what it means to be an embodied subject by critically engaging the genital-sexual schema. Kimoto argues that trans embodiment is best understood not within a bioethical or political framework of repair, but rather through a liberatory framework that centers the deep and diffuse meanings of gender transition. Developing a phenomenological reading of hormonal transition, specifically through the lived experiences of trans feminine people of color, Kimoto contests and reframes medical transition as a central site of trans world-making praxes and transformative politics.

Overall, this cluster of essays contributes to the project of, on the one hand, specifying the unique pressures and constraints on trans existence today, and, on the other, recording, appreciating, and theorizing the salient resistance strategies generated within this community. In doing so, the authors crystallize a variety of insights into

the nature of power, knowledge, and identity relevant to trans studies and philosophy.

BOOK REVIEW

Review of Shotwell's Against Purity: "Interacting in Compromised Times"

Alexis Shotwell (University of Minnesota Press, 2016). ISBN 978-0816698646.

Ami Harbin
OAKLAND UNIVERSITY (MICHIGAN)

Alexis Shotwell's *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* offers a timely and discerning account of the complexities of action in our fraught moral landscape. As I read it, the book's main aim is to challenge a number of pervasive assumptions that are getting in the way of effective ethical action in current contexts of harm, oppression, and suffering. The book will be of interest to, among others, readers attentive to the particular injustices against queers and those beyond the gender binary—it devotes chapters to understanding the work of the ACT UP Oral History Project in reshaping how AIDS was understood, as well as to gender formation and transformation. It will also be of interest to those aware of broader queer histories and practices of reframing moral action, as it builds on and carries forward an archive of queer and feminist theorists who envision moral actions more expansively than do many standard philosophical accounts of the efforts of atomistic, autonomous individuals.

One of the assumptions the book challenges is that the standard contexts for ethical action are ones that are fairly straightforward and dualistic. There is a right way to act and a wrong way. If you are smart enough, you can identify both, and if you are good enough, you will be in the camp of the right ones. On Shotwell's view, to be motivated by the idea that we could get ourselves into such a camp is to be motivated by a myth, and if this goal is our source of motivation, we will not be able to sustain meaningful, long-lasting action.

My reflections will focus on questions about the quality of experiences of acting impurely. I am interested to think about what it is like to come to terms with the inevitability of impure action, and what it can feel like to be within relationships with others who are also unable to get on the "right side," but who are, in many cases, still drawn to the idea that getting to the right side is the goal.

WHAT IT IS LIKE TO ACT IN COMPROMISED TIMES

We seem to be commonly raised (by ethical traditions and by social movements) to think that it is possible to locate the right course of action and secure ourselves within it. As Shotwell writes,

Every major ethical system assesses individual moral formation and activity in the context of

certain collective considerations. And yet each predominant system takes as its unit of analysis the thinking, willing, and acting individual person. Ethics, as it has historically developed, aims to help individuals in their personal ethical decision-making, and we continue to assess moral rights and wrongs at the scale of the individual human. (109)

Given this, and given how formative such approaches may be for many, it does seem that it is likely to be uncomfortable and disconcerting to become more realistic about impure circumstances. Shotwell notes this regularly—it is not likely to feel natural. Such a shift may be deeply disorienting. Within a context of impurity, agents will not get the feeling of satisfaction, of "doneness," that they may be inclined to think signals movement in the right direction.

WHAT IT IS LIKE TO INTERACT IN COMPROMISED TIMES

The book shows that agents live "in a world of unimaginable complexity and difficulty" where they are likely to become "overwhelmed by any attempt to understand the knottiness and tangle of entanglement" in ways which lead to "a purity politics of despair" (195). We are living "in the ruins" (166). Given this, what will be the *interpersonal* dynamics of impure action?

I want to suggest that the realities Shotwell has described mean that there are more complexities of interpersonal ethical relating than agents may have realized. What would it be like to, as she puts it, "perceive complexity and complicity as the constitutive situation of our lives" (Shotwell 2016, 8) while in the midst of relationships with other impure agents? What kind of interaction is called for?

There are suggestions about the kind of interpersonal relating that is needed throughout the book. I want to draw out and group together two of those claims now: (1) opening freedom to others; and (2) prefigurative interaction.

1. OPENING FREEDOM TO OTHERS

Shotwell introduces a sense of "distributed ethics" and claims that we need to "open freedom to others"—that doing so is an "ethically ambiguous but necessary task" (128). She draws on an understanding of distributed cognition and Edwin Hutchins's example of the large navy ship to make the point. Just as the ship will only be navigated if many people and instruments work together to navigate it (no one person alone knows where the boat is), so too is ethical action dependent on multiple agents and conditions—no one agent can act ethically alone. As Shotwell writes, "The moral imperative, taking a distributed morality approach, is to understand that we are placed in a particular context with particular limited capacities that are embedded in a big social operation with multiple players" (130).

Building on this account of distributed ethics, Shotwell turns to Beauvoir to clarify the task of "opening freedom to others." As Shotwell writes,

When I will, as in the case of responding to a war or occupation, I place myself politically . . . [but] the meaning of our willing is determined only in relation to others. . . . Ethics enters through the necessity to hold in view other people's projects in enacting our own. This holding in view will never be completely attained. (131)

She adds further, "We should act in the present in a way that cares for the harms involved in being alive and that tries to open different futures for all of the beings and relations we are with" (135). Given that ethical action is not something that any one agent can do, and given that the meaning of one's actions is determined by the ways they are happening in the context of, and conditional on, the actions of others, agents must act to open up possibilities for others to act (and with the hope that they will open possibilities for us). This is one of the features of interacting in compromised circumstances. I read this as describing something like a capacity to hold space for others such that even when we inevitably and repeatedly fail, we are not fundamentally failures. This partly seems to have to do with a forgiving stance, but also combined with more optimistic expectation—relating to others as though they are unsurprisingly imperfect but also bound, in collectivity with others, to win.

2. PREFIGURATIVE INTERACTION

For Shotwell, prefiguration is "the practice of collectively acting in the present in a way that enacts the world we aspire to create" (166). What prefiguration requires, in part, as Shotwell builds on Angela Davis, is that we "identify into" a new world (167, 169). Such identifying into does not reduce to an idea about identity as determining what politics we are committed to, but rather, involves our taking our identities from our politics so that "we collectively craft identities, ways of being, based in the specific political context we encounter and the political commitments that shape our response to those contexts" (170). Shotwell notes that, for Harsha Walia, prefiguration involves the relationships we facilitate within our movements (184). What modes of interpersonal interaction will be part of prefigurative action and this "identifying into"?

One way Shotwell writes about prefigurative relations is in the discussion of "loving social movement practices" (204) and "being good to each other" (185). Interacting prefiguratively would seem to involve, particularly in conditions of conflict, recognizing the toxic conditions in which many agents learned to relate, and seeing work together as a site to practice recovery and healing. This process is not likely to be straightforward. As Shotwell writes,

I have no settled accounts for where we go from here; only a conviction that we do indeed need to work collectively toward a more collective and relational form of ethics adequate to the global and systemic crises we face. For surely from wherever these crises arise, they produce abiding and urgent moral dilemmas—and surely, it is precisely such situations that such an impure ethics ought to be positioned to address. (132)

The question of how to act and interact in the circumstances Shotwell describes—how to, among other things, open freedom to others, and relate to each other prefiguratively—is complex. Perhaps our best access to knowing how to best relate to each other in our compromised conditions will come from experiencing real-life situations and relations. That is, it seems we will need to look to those who are actively able to do some of this well, who are able to hold others gently and openly, as though failing does not make one a failure. Thankfully, *Against Purity* gives us guidance in how to do so.

ARTICLES

Embodied Thresholds of Sanctuary: Abolitionism and Trans Worldmaking

Andrea Pitts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHARLOTTE

This paper is a brief set of reflections on the contemporary functions of sanctuary and gender-based asylum efforts in the United States. My purpose here is to draw out some lines of inquiry regarding the impact of framings of sanctuary and asylum on the communities most directly harmed by anti-immigrant, anti-Black, and anti-indigenous policies in the United States. More generally, this paper focuses on the criminalization of immigration and the punitive constraints placed on trans and gender-nonconforming migrants in the United States. More specifically, I examine two sites of contemporary state-centered forms of redress offered to migrants: sanctuary city policies and gender-based asylum. My claim is that both sanctuary cities and gender-based asylum reify conceptions of civic order that effectively maintain the US carceral state. First, I briefly outline a history of US immigration policies impacting trans migrants. Then, in the following section, I examine both sanctuary cities and gender-based asylum as responses to the harms impacting trans migrants in the United States. In both cases, I hope to demonstrate, by drawing from work in trans studies, queer migration studies, and critical prison studies, how sites of state-sponsored protection further entrench state violence against trans and gender-nonconforming people. I conclude by briefly discussing possibilities for trans-abolitionist futures.

I begin here with two brief vignettes, each woven from the threads of news media, reports from various nonprofit organizations, and other archival traces of the lives of two people. First, consider a verse from one of Victoria Arellano's favorite songs, a few lines from a 1994 Gloria Trevi ballad, "Siempre a mí":

Si un día maldices la hora en que naciste,
O si tu amor se vuelve un imposible,
Recuerda que me tienes a mí,
Para luchar contra todos, para reír,
Recuerda que me tienes a mí, siempre a mí.¹

While attending a high school in Los Angeles, Arellano would eventually copy these lyrics in English, her hand leaving words on a page that her mother would one day show to reporters. Those lyrics read,

If one day you curse the time in which you were born,
Or if your love becomes impossible,
Remember that you have me,
To fight against everyone, to laugh,
Remember you always have me, always me.

Arellano was seven years old when she traveled north with her mother from Guadalajara, Mexico, settling in California. She was twenty-three in 2007 when she died at Terminal Island Federal Correctional Institution in Los Angeles. Those that knew her remembered her as “muy alegre,” and that she found joy in singing and was hoping to record an album someday.²

I return to more details of Arellano’s life later, but I would like us to consider here another all too brief story, this one drawn from the 1935 autobiography of Edward Corsi, an Italian immigrant who served as the Federal Commissioner of Ellis Island from 1931–1934. While at Ellis Island, Corsi describes a long conversation he had with Frank Martocci in 1931, an interpreter who conducted immigration interviews throughout the early 1900s. Martocci tells the following story about a case that was “queer and hard to handle.”³ Martocci’s comments, as we will see, elide the affirmed identity of his interviewee, and, as such, the specter of state violence against trans migrants that I allude to above in Victoria Arellano’s story begins to come into sharper focus. In the following story, however, this violence occurred over one hundred years ago.

Martocci recounts the following story:

There was, for instance, a second-class passenger from Vera Cruz booked under the name Alejandra Veles. Boyish in appearance, with black hair and an attractive face, she proved to be, despite her earlier insistence to the contrary, a young woman. Vehemently she insisted that her identity had not been questioned before. When Dr. Senner asked her why she wore men’s clothes, she answered that she would rather kill herself than wear women’s clothes. Perhaps some psychoanalyst can explain it, but she said she had always wanted to be a man and it was no fault of hers she had not been born one!⁴

From this fragment, recounting a presumably violent affront to Veles that I return to at the close of this piece, we begin to see some of the contours of the United States’ investments in gender, civic reproduction, and the control of perceived “deviancy,” all iterations of violence that continue to undergird carceral logics of the nation-state today.

From here, I turn to what C. Riley Snorton has described as the “transitive relations” undergirding processes of “subjection and subjectification within racial capitalism.”⁵ One of Snorton’s foci in *Black on Both Sides* (2017) are the

logics of exchange by which Blackness and transness have been put into a series of relationalities within nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiography.⁶ Snorton threads the intricate means by which the Transatlantic slave trade and the fungibility of chattel slaves have framed the terms through which modern transness takes shape, i.e., transness as a conception of the mutability of gender (among other things).⁷ Drawing from Hortense Spillers’s conception of a process of “ungendering,” Snorton analyzes fugitive narratives of Black people who utilized “cross-gendered modes of escape” from captivity.⁸ Fugitivity, on these terms, offers a racialized gender politics of mobility wherein the modern terms of gender/sex that frame trans identities in our contemporary moment have been prefigured by the fungibility, changeability, and relational qualities emerging between the captivity and freedom of enslaved Black peoples. The importance of Snorton’s work for my analysis is to emphasize a view of transness and migration as likewise constituted by state logics of violence and deathly subjectivization. As Lisa Lowe has noted, studies of slavery and immigration have long been treated separately within US history.⁹ As such, the overlapping means by which a given nation-state’s participation in and enactment of anti-Black violence, and its means to reify or attempt to maintain the legitimacy of its borders through immigration policy and enforcement can often be overlooked. Moreover, as Lowe highlights, the modern liberal humanism that undergirds the US democratic nation-state relies on settler colonial logics of domination and imported indentured servitude to shore up the nation’s political legitimacy and continued occupation of the land now labeled “the United States.” Under these critical frameworks, then, I follow Snorton and Lowe to begin to trace a conception of critical trans-migration studies that follows the relational and constitutive means by which “transness” and “migration” function in and against the confines of the nation-state. Thus, in the following section, I seek some critical tools to begin to highlight these transitive relationships.

TRACING THE GEOPOLITICS OF MOBILITY

One place to begin outlining the forms of state violence functioning through discourses of transness and migration would be to look at the shapes and contours of US immigration law. Regarding the constitutive matrices of gender, historically US immigration law in the twentieth century has blurred the relationship between gender and sexuality, and has furthermore utilized exclusionary matrices of disability to delimit the body politic. For example, the Immigration Act of 1917 stated that people considered “constitutional psychopathic inferiors” should be denied entry to the US. The phrase “constitutional psychopathic inferior” is listed with a number of other criteria for exclusion, and the courts thereafter interpreted the phrase to refer to the exclusion of people “who by nature were subject to insanity of one sort or another; that is to say, whose constitution was such that they had not normal mental stability” (1929); and, in 1948, this phrase was interpreted as including “all psychopathic characters such as chronic litigants, sexual perverts, pathological liars, dipsomaniacs, moral imbeciles, and mentally peculiar persons who because of eccentric behavior, defective judgment or abnormal impulses are in repeated conflict with social customs and constituted authorities.”¹⁰ In 1952,

the McCarran-Walter Act explicitly listed among reasons for refusal of admission “psychopathic personalities,” which as stated in a US Senate report made by the Public Health at the time included “homosexuals, sex perverts,” and “sexual deviants.” During this time, state administration explicitly linked “sexual deviancy” to visual gender expression in enforcement efforts to address the difficulty of detecting forms of deviance that serve as markers for exclusion.¹¹ For example, a 1952 report conducted by the Public Health Service for Congress, states the following:

In some cases, considerable difficulty may be encountered in substantiating a diagnosis of homosexuality or sexual perversion. In other instances, where the action or behavior of the person is more obvious, as might be noted in manner of dress (so called “transvestism” or fetishism), the condition may be more easily substantiated.¹²

What this suggests, aside from a fallacious medical belief in a theory of “sexual inversion,” is that those who we might consider today as trans and gender nonconforming migrants were explicitly targeted for exclusion under immigration law by this legislation. By 1965, immigration law went through a reform process, and until 1990, trans and gender nonconforming people could be specifically excluded as “sexual deviates.”¹³

These forms of exclusionary immigration criteria also point to some important distinctions with respect to the functions of the state confronted by migrants, including many contemporary migrants who are seeking asylum in the US today. As Eithne Luibhéid has demonstrated,

Unlike the immigration system, which frames entry as a privilege that can be granted in a discriminatory manner by a sovereign nation-state, the refugee/asylum system is underpinned by a different logic. Here, admission is supposed to be granted based on the United States’ commitment to upholding international human rights laws, which provide asylum to those fleeing persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular group.¹⁴

As such, the first state inclusions of queer or trans people under asylum protection occurred in a 1990 Board of Immigration Appeals case (Toboso-Alfonso 1990) in which a gay man seeking asylum from Cuba was considered a member of a particular social group that can be offered asylum.¹⁵ In 1994, this case became the precedent for other queer persons seeking asylum who could prove a “well-founded fear of future persecution” as members of a specifically targeted group. Later, in 2000, another case, *Hernandez-Montiel v. INS*, found the following:

that a transgender person from Mexico qualified for asylum as a member of a “particular social group.” But that decision did not refer to the applicant as transgender; the court instead called Hernandez-Montiel a “gay man with a female sexual identity.”¹⁶

This legal recognition of trans migrants thus secures a narrative both about the terms that constitute “an asylee” and “a transgender person.” Moreover, in the case of asylum,

refugee/asylum determinations are often driven as much by US foreign policy considerations as by the merits of individual claims (the disparate treatment of Haitian versus Cuban asylum seekers, historically, is an example). Furthermore, asylum adjudications provide opportunities for the construction or reiteration of a racist, imperialist imagery that has material consequences on a global scale.¹⁷

Here, we see that imperial aspirations, including the racialized hierarchies of the US and Europe, function in and through immigration and asylum law.

A few things to note about this legal history: first, although my focus in this paper is migration, asylum and immigration processes are, as Luibhéid notes, “still most accessible to those migrants who are cisgender heterosexual economically privileged white men of Western European origins.”¹⁸ In this vein, as Rhonda V. Magee has argued, the political and legal apparatuses of chattel slavery served as the United States’ first iterations of what we might consider immigration law. She writes:

[C]hattel slavery was, among very many other things, a compulsory form of immigration, the protection and regulation of which, under federal and state law, was our nation’s first system of “immigration law.” As a consequence, the formal system that developed was inculcated with the notion of a permanent, quasi-citizen-worker underclass and privileged white ethnics under naturalization law—its legacies we can see up to the present day.¹⁹

Magee’s aim (and my own) is not to conflate twentieth- and twenty-first-century patterns of voluntary migration with the brutality, dehumanization, and forced captivity, confinement, and commodification of African and African diasporic peoples that occurred through the Transatlantic slave trade. Rather, Magee argues that the white supremacist racializing order that operates within contemporary immigration law can be better elaborated through an understanding of the singularly brutal legal administration of the Transatlantic slave trade, and the development of nineteenth-century immigration law that was built in the afterlife of US chattel slavery. Notably, Martha D. Escobar explains:

Once slavery was transformed (rather than abolished) in 1865, the federal government began to regulate who entered the nation and under what conditions. This regulation was established in part because the United States desired cheapened labor in order to continue its westward expansion. However, the end of slavery limited the ability of white settlers to make use of Black bodies for this project. Consequently, the United States turned

toward Asia, specifically China. The introduction of Chinese and other Asian (im)migrants enabled the development of the West. However, informed by racial knowledge developed in relationship to slavery and indigenous genocide, the presence of foreign bodies who culturally and racially appeared different created conflict and, in turn, influenced (im)migration policies. The first federal (im) migration law, the Page Law of 1875, barred the entrance of Asian women believed to be entering for “lewd and immoral purposes.”²⁰

Thus, the origins of immigration law in the United States follow from the shifting terms of formal abolition legislation, US settler colonial capitalist expansion to the West, the transitive relations of migrant labor classes, and the gendered practices of workers. As such, the Page Law of 1875 sought to regulate of bodies, desires, and intimacies between Asian women and men (both Asian and white) participating in the industrialization and colonization of the West.²¹

Lastly, an additional important component to bring out of this history connects to what Mansha Mirza has described as an overlapping relationship between migration studies and disability studies. Mirza draws on a conception of the geopolitics of mobility to link the limits and constraints imposed through seeking asylum with the construct of disability. Mirza writes, specifically describing experiences of displacement by those seeking asylum status,

both disability and displacement represent a disruption of the “natural order of things,” the social categories that modern societies tend to be grounded in. The condition of displacement subverts social categories based on “nation-states,” thereby generating anomalies, that is, persons embodying a transitional state—neither belonging to their country of origin or their country of asylum. Likewise, disability subverts social constructions of “personhood,” whereby disabled people are also seen as anomalies, that is, embodying a transitional state—neither full person nor nonperson. Disabled and displaced persons are often construed as “aberrations in need of therapeutic intervention” and become recipients of institutionalized practices targeted at returning them to the natural order of things, either back into the fold of the nation-state or back into the state of normalcy. And until this return to the natural order is achieved, people falling under both conditions may be subjected to long-term confinement.²²

Mirza’s work connects the stability and maintenance of the nation-state to a normative conception of embodiment. Notably, the framing of “normalcy,” including gender, sexual, psychological, and morphological normalcy, to conceptions of rightful citizenship can be found throughout the immigration law listed above.

In this way, if we extend these arguments regarding the limitations and constraints of migrants to the carceral logics impacting trans migration, this will specifically link

us to the pathologization and exclusion codified through contemporary immigration law. Moreover, as I outline below through two state-sponsored responses to violence inflicted on migrants, such state-centered solutions may still carry punitive outcomes that reify carceral logics that continue to impact trans migrants specifically.

SANCTUARY CITIES AND GENDER-BASED ASYLUM

With this legal framing in mind, I would like to focus on sanctuary cities and gender-based asylum, two state-centered responses to violence committed against migrants. The first effort involves establishing sanctuary spaces for undocumented migrants to seek refuge if they are being targeted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. A. Naomi Paik writes of the sanctuary movement:

Originally established in the 1980s and reinvigorated since the early 2000s, this movement encompasses a coalition of religious congregations, local jurisdictions, educational institutions, and even restaurants, that commit to supporting immigrants, regardless of status. Emerging from congregations that have provided shelter to refugees and immigrants under threat of deportation, the movement has spread to city, county and state governments that have passed sanctuary policies that limit their cooperation with federal immigration authorities in tracking down and deporting undocumented immigrants.²³

There is a long and multifaceted history of the sanctuary movement in the US, much of which involves the massive migrations of Central American peoples fleeing US-backed civil wars in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras in the 1980s. While I do not have space to describe that history in detail here, there are a few important differences between this earlier movement and contemporary iterations of sanctuary efforts today. In particular, in the 1980s, churches and religiously affiliated leaders and groups were central to providing shelter and safe passage across the US-Mexico border. Today, while many religiously affiliated groups remain committed to providing shelter for undocumented migrants, sanctuary policies have also come to take the form of citywide ordinances that instruct local law enforcement to refuse to honor detainer requests from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”), or to refrain from asking people questions regarding their citizenship status. Moreover, unlike the 1980s critique of US foreign policy that operated within the sanctuary movement, today, many of the justifications for citywide sanctuary efforts are focused on supporting local police enforcement. Namely, when local police officers are required to enforce federal immigration law (e.g., through 287g agreements between federal and local police), the argument contends, migrants will no longer report crimes to the police and thus may become further victimized.

Yet, as Paik outlines, while a number of “sanctuary cities” have issued ordinances that aim to prevent local police and law enforcement administration from carrying out the duties of federal immigration law, many “noncompliance”

policies, in practice, offer little to protect those who are impacted daily by harassment, raids, and deportation under US immigration policy more generally. Because sanctuary city policies often stem from liberal framings of jurisdictional responsibilities for local and federal law enforcement, these efforts support state investments in civic order by surveilling, constraining, and imprisoning people of color and other communities rendered “deviant” or as “undeserving” of the state’s neoliberal protections. As such, trans people, Black, brown, and indigenous peoples, and disabled people, many of whom are already targeted by local police, are likely to continue to face harassment and abuse under sanctuary policies.

Even within the New Sanctuary Movement (“NSM”), a series of efforts taking place through churches and nonprofit organizations, the narrative of the “deserving immigrant” also tends to surface. Paik writes,

while the scope of the NSM among churches has expanded to encompass anyone facing deportation orders, it, too, selects immigrants “whose legal cases clearly reveal the contradictions and moral injustice of our current immigration system.” The chosen must be facing a deportation order and have US citizen children, a “good work record,” and a “viable case under current law.”²⁴

As Paik reminds us, “ICE has found ways to meet its deportation orders despite sanctuary policies, which, while refusing cooperation, cannot ban ICE from performing its work on its own. ICE agents have stalked courthouses, accosting people and crosschecking publicly posted bond sheets against DHS databases.”²⁵ In this sense, in cities like Los Angeles, which has had sanctuary policies in place since 1979, undocumented trans people like Victoria Arellano may likely continue to face persecution from immigration and customs enforcement. That is, under Los Angeles law, Arellano’s criminal convictions for three misdemeanors—driving without a license, driving under the influence, and being under the influence of a controlled substance—were what led to her eventual detention at Terminal Island.²⁶ While local police did not interrogate her about her citizenship status, the sentencing judge that she confronted once in custody concluded that “the conviction of the offense for which [she was] charged [would] have the consequences of deportation, exclusion from admission to the United States, or denial of naturalization.”²⁷ In fact, Arellano’s detention and subsequent death at the hands of immigration and customs enforcement was made possible via a policy put into place decades earlier. Under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, persons convicted of a felony or three misdemeanors were deemed inadmissible for legalization. As such, while sanctuary efforts do offer protections against interrogation and federal enforcement by local police and have responded to some of the administrative obstacles experienced by migrants, such policies do not prevent the forms of harassment, abuse, hyperpolicing, and strict sentencing that many trans people, people of color, disabled people, and poor people experience regardless of their citizenship status.

Secondly, we can briefly explore another option available for trans migrants seeking to avoid further displacement. As we also see in Arellano’s story, she and several other trans women at Terminal Island were seeking asylum from their countries of origin. By establishing a “credible fear of persecution” stemming from the threat of violence against them as transgender people, trans migrants may be granted status to remain in the US and obtain a work permit. Given that trans people in Mexico, for example, face high rates of violence, and that transphobic attacks and homicides have risen in recent years following the 2010 legalization of same-sex marriage in Mexico City, a number of Mexican trans migrants have sought asylum within the US.²⁸ Along these lines, a number of attorneys and aid groups for trans migrants have sought to clarify the process for seeking asylum. The Transgender Law Center, for example, offers bilingual (Spanish and English) factsheets for trans and gender-nonconforming migrants to help support detainees through the interview process used to establish eligibility for asylum status.²⁹ For many migrants who are detained, applying for asylum becomes a means “to fight for your papers” as Diana Santander, a fellow trans woman and friend of Arellano locked up at Terminal Island, encouraged her to do upon her arrival.³⁰

Like sanctuary city policies, however, filing for asylum also provides a limited set of state-centered options for undocumented trans and gender-nonconforming people. Candidates for asylum are often required to give a very specific set of narratives that will legibly justify their claims for staying in the US. As Lionel Cantú’s work as an expert witness in cases involving migrants from Mexico demonstrates:

One issue was that to gain asylum on the basis of being persecuted for one’s sexual orientation [or, we could add, gender], the applicant has to prove that being [queer or trans] is an “immutable” aspect of [one’s] selfhood. This tricky undertaking runs the risk of reinscribing essentialist notions of [gender and sexual] identity that scholars have spent decades painstakingly challenging. The second issue was that . . . receiving asylum requires painting one’s country in racist, colonialist terms, while at the same time disavowing the United States’ role in contributing to the oppressive conditions that one fled.³¹

In this sense, the conditions of survival for transgender and gender-nonconforming peoples are placed directly within the US’s ability to ensure their “safety” and “security” from a seemingly corrupt or unstable site of civic (dis)order. Additionally, the result of such reifications of “backwardness” or lack of civic stability thereby serve to further support military and cultural interventionist efforts, including trade restrictions or increased funding for the militarization of a given country’s law enforcement.

A further patterned violence impacting trans migrants, including those seeking asylum status, is that legally, detention centers do not operate within the same jurisdictional boundaries as other forms of contemporary US incarceration. Notably, detention centers, even those that

are housed within federal prison facilities such as Terminal Island, are effectively “extra-territorial zones,” which are, as Mirza states, “exceptional states [that are] both inside and outside the law.”³² As such, detained migrants often experience prolonged periods of detention, without due process and access to bond hearings (given the recent Supreme Court decision in *Jennings v. Rodriguez*), and there is little oversight regarding basic health and safety conditions within detention centers.

Regarding this set of concerns, we return to the deathly nexus of disability, racism, and transphobic violence impacting Arellano. Her death, like many others under conditions of incarceration, was preventable. She died from an AIDS-related infection that could have been treated with antiretroviral medication as well as antibiotics that are known to be effective for HIV-positive patients, such as dapson, which Arellano had been taking prior to being detained.³³ Yet, rather than being treated, Arellano’s infection worsened, her health deteriorated, and medical staff repeatedly ignored and neglected her demands for medical care. A number of people whom she had befriended while she was incarcerated describe caring for her after she became ill. People began helping her get into and out of bed, and began helping her eat during her last few months alive. Among these caretakers was her close friend Walter Ayala, who had fled El Salvador to the US after witnessing the murder of his friend, a trans woman, who was killed by a military soldier during the country’s civil war. Ayala, who, along with a number of other migrants seeking sanctuary from the violence in their home countries caused in part by US interests, sadly would witness another trans friend die at the hands of the state, this time, however, through the slow death of medical neglect within the facility that was imprisoning them both.³⁴

Lastly, while citywide sanctuary efforts and gender-based asylum may offer substantive benefits for those seeking temporary state aid, these efforts need to be examined in terms of their collateral impacts on US-born Black populations as well. As Janaé Bonsu has argued regarding sanctuary,

Whether it’s stop-and-frisk or no-knock raids, both undocumented immigrants and US-born Black folks have a vested stake in redefining what sanctuary really means, and in resisting Trump’s “law-and-order” agenda. Trump has made it clear that he is committed to strengthening all law enforcement, not just immigration agents. Thus, policies that address racist policing, incarceration and criminalization must be part of the demands of the immigrant rights movement. As long as the immigration and criminal justice systems are interconnected, creating real sanctuary cities is an issue of linked fate and real practical, principled solidarity.³⁵

In this vein, the current political administration’s policies, including its “zero-tolerance” efforts that have heightened and made more visible the destructiveness of family separation through immigration enforcement, are intricately linked to anti-Black and anti-indigenous

state action as well. Notably, the ravages of social and civil death, including the destruction of legal, spatial, and intimate bonds between families, partners, and loved ones, can be traced through US chattel slavery and its afterlives, including the hyperpolicing and incarceration of Black communities today.³⁶ So too, as Sarah Deer has outlined in her work, indigenous communities across what is currently the United States continue to face the long-term cultural, familial, and administrative harms that have resulted from the forced family separations that occurred under government-sponsored boarding schools. Such patterns of state-sponsored social and civil death remain haunting precursors and present realities that help frame the family separations occurring through US immigration enforcement today. Specifically, they remind us of the interconnected white supremacist policies that continue to “secure” the nation’s borders.³⁷

I want to thereby urge us to continue to critically imagine stretching, bending, and expanding worlds beyond contemporary conceptions of sanctuary and gender-based asylum. This does not necessarily mean that we must fight against these efforts per se, but rather to see their limitations and their means for reifying the state as a site of security and stability. Such investments in the state’s carceral power to decide who is deserving of care, trust, health, and mobility invariably leads to increased harms for trans, disabled, Black, indigenous, and any other people vulnerable to the state’s refusal. As such, I conclude here with a few brief comments on worldmaking beyond the prison-military industrial complex.³⁸

TRANS WORLDMAKING BEYOND THE PRISON-MILITARY INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Against such state-centered efforts, organizations such as Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement, Ni Uno Más/Not 1 More, Southerners on New Ground, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and the Undocuqueer Movement, among others, have developed nonpunitive, community-centered models as an alternative to current immigration policy. Community-centered models aim to reframe social life around the creation of conditions that ensure the thriving of vulnerable communities regardless of desert or merit, including communities of color subject to the harms of military interventionism and harms against gender-nonconforming and trans persons who are subject to conditions of state surveillance, policing, and violence.

Alongside the work of these organizations, we can glean further insight into the models for care and affirmation for trans life beyond those of asylum and state-sponsored sanctuary. On July 12, while Arellano lay dying in her bed, a group of detainees refused to comply with orders to do an evening head count and began shouting, “Hospital! Hospital! Hospital!” to demand that she receive care.³⁹ Finally, through this act of resistance, Arellano would eventually be taken to a medical facility and put on a respirator. Unfortunately, their efforts could not save her life, and she died on the morning of July 20, 2007. However, the efforts of the sixty-one detainees who signed a petition protesting the medical neglect she had experienced and those who shouted for her, cared for her, and sang with

her speak to the affirmation of her life. My paper here may not be adding much to Victoria Arellano's story, or to the fragmented history that we have of Veles, who suffered invasive questioning about his body and understanding of self at the hands of immigration enforcement at Ellis Island. Within these vignettes and their placement within the two broader state-centered approaches I describe above, I urge us to look for worlds beyond the state's demands for compliance with binary gender norms, and for life-giving worlds that exist beyond the state's conceptions of "desert" or "merit" that are then used to distribute the resources necessary for survival.

I like to think of these worlds as akin to what Reina Gossett describes as "trans legacies."⁴⁰ Notably, she writes that she "wants to know more about how trans people have supported or rejected abolitionism and gender self-determination within a range of political movements. . . . I want a fuller scope of our social history. . . . Rather than simply reclaiming our lineage, let's start to change the context."⁴¹ As such, perhaps we can draw from the Gloria Trevi lyrics that Arellano penned in her hand, that "si [nuestro] amor se vuelve un imposible"/"if [our] love becomes impossible," we must remember Victoria/recordemos Victoria, and with her, we can "luchar contra"/"fight against" the systems that seek to entrench cycles of death for so many communities.

Finally, perhaps we can also "reir"/"laugh" with her in an effort to turn away from the state's desire for racialized death. In this vein, consider Veles again, who appears to have protested his interrogation by asserting that he had never been questioned regarding his identity, and whose good fortune allowed him access to a lawyer to aid his case. When Veles was asked if there was anything else he wanted before he left the US port, he demanded, in the face of the state's invasive and violating inquiries, "two plugs of tobacco and a pipe," which he was granted.⁴² In this sense, finding the pleasures, joys, and worlds beyond state-sponsored forms of security and comfort are important to rejecting carceral logics as well.

As Mimi Kim has argued with respect to feminist anti-violence work, often social movements aimed at critiquing state logics of violence end up becoming entwined and reliant on state-centered models of law enforcement and stability. What Kim describes as "the dance of the carceral creep" "reveals how impressive social movement successes can lead to effects that undermine the goals of and eventually subordinate movement actors and institutions to the greater aims of the movement's prior targets."⁴³ By this, Kim points to the means by which previously survivor- and community-centered models of feminist antiviolence organizing shift to models of law enforcement that "lock their gaze with predominantly male, state targets, located within the masculine systems of the criminal justice system."⁴⁴ As such, finding further means to resist state-sponsored dependency and comfort is important when seeking to understand the relationalities between transness and migration.⁴⁵ Sanctuary efforts and gender-based asylum are but two instances of the ways in which "the dance of the carceral creep" may begin to become part of our social networks and hopes for the liveability of trans communities. To honor the lives and memories of

Veles and Arellano, we must call upon and remember our trans ancestors who have refused state logics of violence and to remain accountable to them: *recuerden que ustedes tienen a nosotros, siempre a nosotros.*⁴⁶

NOTES

1. Gloria Trevi, "Siempre a mí," Letras.com, <https://www.letras.com/gloria-trevi/868208/>. Accessed March 11, 2018.
2. Ben Ehrenreich, "Death on Terminal Island," *Los Angeles Magazine*, September 1, 2008, <http://www.lamag.com/longform/death-on-terminal-island/>. Accessed March 11, 2018.
3. Edward Corsi, *In the Shadow of Liberty: The Chronicle of Ellis Island* (New York: MacMillan, 1935), 81.
4. Ibid.
5. C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2017), 6.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 56–57.
8. Ibid., 57.
9. Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 37–38.
10. US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit – 33 F.2d 267 (2d Cir. 1929), June 10, 1929; Cited in US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit – 250 F.2d 436 (2d Cir. 1957). "Matter of LaRochelle," in *Deportation Proceedings A-7128195*. Decided by Board December 1, 1965.
11. § 212 (a) (4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952; Cited in Eithne Luibhéid, "Queer Migration and Citizenship," in *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, US Citizenship, and Border Crossings*, ed. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005): xii–xiii.
12. House, 82d Cong., 2d sess., 1952, Rep. 1365, 47; Cited in Eithne Luibhéid, "'Looking Like a Lesbian': The Organization of Sexual Monitoring at the United States-Mexican Border," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8, no. 3 (January 1998): 477–506.
13. Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, cited in Luibhéid, "Queer Migration and Citizenship," xiii.
14. Ibid., xvi–xvii.
15. Transgender Law Center and Cornell University Law School LGBT Clinic, *Report on Human Rights Conditions of Transgender Women in Mexico*, May 2016 (Ithaca: Cornell Law School, 2016), 5.
16. Ibid.
17. Luibhéid, "Queer Migration and Citizenship," xviii.
18. Luibhéid, "Queer Migration and Citizenship," xvii.
19. Rhonda V. Magee, "Slavery as Immigration?" *University of San Francisco Law Review* 44, no. 2 (2009): 273–306.
20. Martha D. Escobar, *Captivity Beyond Prisons: Criminalization Experiences of Latina (Im)migrants* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 33.
21. Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2002), 34–35.
22. Mansha Mirza, "Refugee Camps, Asylum Detention, and the Geopolitics of Transnational Migration: Disability and its Intersections with Humanitarian Confinement," in *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada*, ed. Liat Ben-Moshe, Christ Chapman, and Allison C. Carey (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 217.
23. A. Naomi Paik, "Abolitionist Futures and the US Sanctuary Movement," *Race and Class* 59, no. 2 (2017): 3–25, p. 5.
24. Ibid., 14.
25. Ibid.
26. Ehrenreich, "Death on Terminal Island."

27. Ibid.
28. Transgender Law Center and Cornell University Law School LGBT Clinic 2016, 14–15.
29. Transgender Law Center, “Credible Fear Interviews: What You Need to Know as a TGNC Immigrant” and “Las Entrevistas de Miedo Creíbles: Que Necesitas Saber Si Eres es Un Inmigrante TGNC,” Immigration Resources, TransgenderLawCenter.org, <https://transgenderlawcenter.org/resources/immigration>. Accessed March 11, 2018.
30. Ehrenreich, “Death on Terminal Island.”
31. Lionel Cantú, Jr., “Well Founded Fear: Political Asylum and the Boundaries of Sexual Identity in the US-Mexico Borderlands,” in *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*, ed. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 61–62.
32. Mirza, “Refugee Camps, Asylum Detention, and the Geopolitics of Transnational Migration,” 224.
33. Ehrenreich, “Death on Terminal Island.”
34. Ibid.
35. Janaé Bonsu, “Black People Need Sanctuary Cities, Too,” *Essence*.com, March 10, 2017, <https://www.essence.com/news/politics/sanctuary-cities-black-families-immigrants>.
36. See, for example, Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), and Colin Dayan, *The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
37. For more on the relationship between US slavery and “sanctuary” practices of resistance against state-sponsored violence, see Barbara Krauthamer, “Before Sanctuary Cities, Here’s How Black Americans Protected Fugitive Slaves,” *The Conversation*.com, February 6, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/before-sanctuary-cities-heres-how-black-americans-protected-fugitive-slaves-72048>.
38. I borrow this term from Juanita Díaz-Cotto to highlight to mutual imbrication between domestic law enforcement and foreign policies operationalized through the US military, such as the “war on drugs.” See, for example, Julianne Hing, “Juanita Díaz-Cotto: Beyond the Binary Behind Bars,” *Guernica: A Magazine of Global Arts and Politics*, Guernicamag.com, June 17, 2013, <https://www.guernicamag.com/beyond-the-binary-behind-bars/>.
39. Ibid.
40. Che Gossett, “Abolitionist Imaginings: A Conversation with Bo Brown, Reina Gossett, and Dylan Rodriguez,” in *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*, 2nd ed., eds. Eric A. Stanley and Nat Smith (Oakland: AK Press, 2015), 367.
41. Ibid., 368.
42. Corsi, *In the Shadow of Liberty*, 82.
43. Mimi Kim, “Dancing the Carceral Creep: The Anti-Domestic Violence Movement and the Paradoxical Pursuit of Criminalization, 1973–1986,” *UC Berkeley: Institute for the Study of Societal Issues* (2015) Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/804227k6>, 24.
44. Ibid.
45. For more on trans politics beyond the state, see Dean Spade, *Normal Life Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Durham: Duke, 2015).
46. I am using the gender neutral -e ending to modify the first-person plural pronoun. For more on the use of the gender-neutral ending in Spanish, see Jorge Diz Pico, “Le último jedi y otros usos del neutro,” *Medium*.com, June 26, 2017, <https://medium.com/el-rat%C3%B3n-ciengo/le-%C3%BAltime-jedi-y-otros-usos-del-neutro-ae0b491c68bc>; and Elena Alvarez Melledo, “Todas, tod@s, todxs, todes: historia de la disidencia gramatical,” *El Diario*, June 27, 2017, https://www.eldiario.es/zonacritica/Todas-todes-historia-disidencia-gramatical_6_659044117.html.

Puzzle Pieces: Shapes of Trans Curiosity

Perry Zurn

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Ryka Aoki, in *Seasonal Velocities*, writes, “To be transgender means never quite knowing which reaction you’re going to get, where, or from whom. You can be a sister one moment, then have a security guard stop you in the bathroom the next. In one store, the salesperson will smile and say welcome. In another, you’ll get ugly stares and giggles.”¹ It would be one thing if it were everyone, every time. But it’s anyone, any time. The monadic lottery of it all is almost cruel. And when you are stopped or stared at, it is with some version of the question, *What are you?* Never who. Later in the book, Aoki continues:

I don’t want to have to worry about the closet, or being erased, or never accepted. I really would rather wonder which friends will I grow old with, comfortable with? Who will I watch old TV shows with? Who will be with me at 2031 Pride? Who will bring the dog? Who has the program, and hey, did anyone remember a pen?²

Here, Aoki deftly shifts from being a what to being a who. She wants the freedom to wonder, to ask, to be curious, rather than be another person’s curiosity. Rather than wonder, as any trans person must, when the next inquisition, the next rejection will strike, she wants the chance to wonder about the people and the dogs, the Prides and the programs that will lend shape to her life. Wondering about the mundanities of *un stylo* is the privilege of a who, a who in this case with a special affinity for pens.

What Aoki captures so well on an individual level, transgender studies analyzes on a structural level. In framing trans studies, scholars often combat reductive cultural representations of transgender people with rich, complicated depictions and histories that are true to trans realities. Against, as Sandy Stone put it, the “relentless totalization” of trans experience, which reduces trans people to “homogenized, totalized objects,”³ trans studies scholars aim to explore the divergent experiences of trans subjectivities in community. Scholars undertake this work along a number of vectors. Where contemporary cultural productions repeatedly represent trans people as singular, voiceless, non-agential individuals, who appear on the scene as ever new and strange, trans studies scholars underscore the multiplicity of trans experience, the voice and activism of trans people, and the long history of trans communities. That is, they insistently demonstrate that trans people are not objects but subjects, not whats but whos. Sandy Stone, after insisting that trans people have typically had “no voice”⁴ in discussions about them, calls for trans people “to generate a true, effective and representational counterdiscourse.”⁵ As if in answer, Susan Stryker wrote *Transgender History*, which counters the “exploitative or sensationalistic mass media representations”⁶ of transgender experience with a “collective political history of transgender social change activism in the United States.”⁷ Against the reduction of trans experience to a single

signifier, therefore, trans studies undertakes a historical, as much as phenomenological, counteroffensive.

Whether in journalism or medicine, education,⁸ law,⁹ or television,¹⁰ trans writers and trans studies scholars consistently develop this critique of the representational totalization of trans people, whereby they are and have been made whats, not whos; objects, not subjects; voiceless, not vocal; passive, not active; dehistoricized, not historical; and single, not multiple. In what follows, I aim to supplement this critique by attending to the role of curiosity both as a technique of (trans) objectification and as a practice of (trans) freedom, on both the individual and social level. That is, I trace how curiosity—through the monadic and collective acts of gazing, inquiring, investigating, and imagining—functions as part of the project of the representational totalization of trans people but also as part of trans people’s own praxis of resistant de-totalization. My goal, throughout this inquiry, is not only to contribute to the nascent sociopolitical philosophy of curiosity, but also to advance independent conversations in both curiosity studies and trans studies. Within curiosity studies, there is a bivalent account of curiosity as oppressive and liberating, as objectifying and humanizing.¹¹ Here, I extend that account to trans studies. Trans studies, in turn, has long diagnosed an objectifying curiosity; here, I highlight the rarely remarked or theorized fact that curiosity is also practiced within trans communities—in rich, multivariant, and perhaps unexpected ways. Through these analyses, I argue, philosophically, that curiosity is more than an individual, innate capacity; it is also a series of social practices that must be ethically and politically evaluated as such.

I. METHOD AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To begin, let me offer a quick note on method. Consistent with my commitment to honoring trans meaning-making and knowledge-building practices, I explore curiosity as a technique of objectification and practice of freedom through the terms and discourses of trans people themselves. As such, I consult primarily a substantive selection of trans memoirs and autobiographical writings (including work by Ryka Aoki, Sarah McBride, Jennifer Boylan, Lady Chablis, Ma-Nee Chacaby, Lovemme Carazon, Ivan Coyote, Jamison Green, Nick Krieger, Dierdre McCloskey, Lei Ming, Janet Mock, Rae Spoon, Rizi Xavier Timane, and Max Valerio). My reliance on trans memoir should not signal a reduction of trans people to their experiences—as if they are only capable of feeling and not thinking—but rather a recognition that, in the very negotiation of experience, trans people are always already theorizing. Furthermore, within these texts, I trace the word “curiosity,” related words or phrases (such as question, inquiry, and the desire to know), and interrogative sentences themselves. While I make no claim to an exhaustive analysis of curiosity’s role in trans literature and scholarship, I trust that I offer here a representative sampling of trans perspectives on curiosity, as well as a preliminary analysis thereof.

What precisely is curiosity, such that it can make objects and (re)claim subjects? According to Enlightenment thinkers, curiosity is a natural, organic impulse that contributes to science, industry, and therefore the prosperity of humankind. This curiosity is innate and individual, rational

and useful. John Locke, for example, defined curiosity as an “appetite for knowledge,” which ought to be “as carefully cherished in children as other appetites suppressed.”¹² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in turn, characterized curiosity as “a principle natural to the human heart,” which must be scrupulously trained if the young person is to become an ideal citizen.¹³ As a natural capacity, curiosity is itself neutral and is either badly or bravely applied by individuals based on their character and education. By contrast, for late modern and postmodern thinkers, it is impossible to understand curiosity—even if it is an embodied desire—apart from its function in a sociopolitical context. Curiosity, here, is expressed through material and discursive practices within social and institutional frameworks. For Friedrich Nietzsche, there is a sort of curiosity that is “sober, pragmatic,” busying itself with the “countless minutiae” that buoy civilization;¹⁴ whereas there is another, “fateful curiosity”¹⁵ that has the capacity to deconstruct everything. For Michel Foucault, there is likewise an institutional curiosity that categorizes and taxonomizes according to inherited frameworks,¹⁶ while there is another, resistant curiosity that “throw[s] off familiar ways of thought.”¹⁷ Rather than bely moral or immoral character, expressions of curiosity are here radical or repressive depending on whether they sustain or disrupt oppressive systems of power.

Today, curiosity is largely understood as a desire to know. From the dominant psychological perspective, this desire to know is generated by novel stimuli; curiosity is the drive to fill a newly perceived information gap. If trans people deviate from a natural gender binary, for example, it would stand to reason that they constitute novel stimuli and, as such, would be natural objects of curiosity. While illuminative of the symbiosis between novelty and curiosity, this perspective is dissatisfying insofar as it fails to account for the sociohistorical contexts that determine the expression of biological impulses. Trans people are made novel through the naturalization of binary categories; proper gender signifiers are constructed in advance. It is perhaps more accurate to say, then, that there are collections of individuals whose innate desiring machines are honed in such a way as to take trans people as objects. Curiosity here remains an individual, embodied desire, which is nevertheless cultivated, disciplined, and directed by specific social forces and investments. On this model, curiosity is a trained affect, embedded in a *habitus*, appearing on individual and collective registers. Curiosity is something one or more persons feel and what one or more persons do. As such, curiosity might be defined as a material and discursive multivariant praxis of inquiry, coupled with certain affects and neurological signatures, and traceable in individuals and groups.¹⁸ Thus, in the following analysis of curiosity’s role in trans objectification—and especially in trans freedom, the question is both how does curiosity feel and how does it function? How are the practices of gazing, querying, investigating, experimenting, and world-traveling lived and deployed?

II. TRANS PEOPLE AS THE OBJECTS OF CURIOSITY

Trans people consistently experience themselves as the object of other people’s curiosity. Whether that be the long

looks, stares, or outright gawking by people on the street (Are you male or female? Boy or girl?), the well-meaning, but often invasive questions of friends and family (How do you know? Will you have the surgery? What about hormones?), the battery of questionnaires and exams conducted by medical professionals (including general practitioners, surgeons, psychologists, psychiatrists, etc.), or the spectacularizing attention afforded trans icons across various social media (from Christine Jorgenson to Janet Mock, Laverne Cox, and Caitlyn Jenner), this experience is a bit like living under “orange alert,” to use Coyote’s phrase.¹⁹ As the object of curiosity at every turn, trans people are forced to live defensively, constantly parrying unwanted attention, often in a vain attempt to guard not only their privacy but their legitimacy. After all, to be steadily questioned here is to be fundamentally put in question, to be made the object of suspicion. As such, trans people regularly experience themselves as a socio-epistemological problem. The barrage of questions constitutes them as outliers, as nodes in a network that denies them, as puzzle pieces picked up, pressed unforgettingly, and then put to one side.

Transgender literature and scholarship identify five primary sources of objectifying curiosity: the public, friends and family, the media, medicine, and academia. Green speaks for many when he recalls the curious “stares”²⁰ of strangers who, particularly when he was more androgynous, “gawked” at him and “scrutinized” him for “signs of any gender.”²¹ Whether on the street or the subway,²² in a restaurant²³ or a bathroom,²⁴ relentless public attention can signal anything from mild “indifference or mere curiosity” to “loathing,” “anger,” and impending “violence.”²⁵ For many trans people subject to public gawking, there is no respite at home, only fewer stares and more questions. Friends and family typically think their relative position of intimacy with a trans person gives them a right to full disclosure, warranting any demand for information they can muster, whether regarding names or pronouns, hormones or surgery, sexual practices or dysphoria. Boylan recalls being asked, “How did you know, when you were a child?”²⁶ And Coyote: “I was just wondering if you always knew?”²⁷ Often, according to Green, these questions are less than innocent, masking the real query: “How could you do this to me? How could you be so selfish? How could you? How *could* you?”²⁸ In media circuits and medical settings, trans people face a particularly potent curiosity, often targeting the status of their bodies and sexual morphology. As Carol Riddell states, “We have some curiosity value to the media as freaks.”²⁹ Reporters are particularly keen to ask if so-and-so has had “the surgery.”³⁰ This is a “genital-curiosity,” as S. Orchard calls it, from which medical professionals are far from immune.³¹ Wherever it appears, this objectifying curiosity involves practices of staring, gawking, and scrutinizing,³² as well as asking sometimes seemingly innocent,³³ but other times overtly abrasive, passive aggressive questions.³⁴

Academia is a realm in which the curious objectification of trans people is especially entrenched. While this gaze is sometimes located in classmates³⁵ and students,³⁶ its real bastion lies in theory and scholarship. As Talia Mae Bettcher says of academic discourse, “trans people have long been curious objects, puzzles, tropes, and discursive levers on the way to somebody else’s agenda.”³⁷ Amy Marvin argues that

such objecthood is the result of a process of “curiotization” which abstracts and dehistoricizes trans people, turning them into curios.³⁸ The effect of this curiosity is detrimental to trans people insofar as it produces conceptual distinctions that underscore the artifice of trans identity or stereotypical narratives that deny the gnarled complexity of trans experience.³⁹ Sandy Stone famously attributed a fundamental coloniality to the academic “fascination” with and “denial of subjectivity” to trans people.⁴⁰ Vivian Namaste, in turn, insists that the theoretical uses of trans experience in feminist theory must be decolonized through accurate, relevant research that affords trans communities equal partnership in the inquiry and ownership of the results.⁴¹ This is more than a shift in citational practices, C. Jacob Hale insists; it is a real “humility” and willingness to travel in trans worlds.⁴² Thus, as it appears in academia—or in public, among friends and family, in the media, or in medicine—the curious objectification of trans people is felt, practiced, and resisted on an individual as well as a social register.

III. TRANS PEOPLE AS THE SUBJECTS OF CURIOSITY

Curiosity is not only present in trans people’s accounts of their own experiences with others; it also functions as a tool of resistance by which trans people foster the rich self and social life typically denied them by institutionalized forms of curiosity. That is, rather than merely objects of curiosity, trans people are practitioners of curiosity—whether in their early explorations of themselves, their cis counterparts, or their queer family, their choice of name, their clothes, their self-advocacy within the medical industry, as lovers and sexual partners, or in their reimagination of masculinity and femininity. To be trans, authors consistently emphasize, is a journey, a discovery, a quest, an exploration, an evolution, involving experimentation, observation, imagination, and so, so many questions. It is a vortex of curiosity.

The early development of trans identity involves a long series of trial and error experiments, forming the eminently curious investigation of gender itself and gender for oneself. Mock captures this moment well when, rejecting the “born this way” narrative, she admits, “I grew to be certain about who I was, but that doesn’t mean there wasn’t a time when I was learning the world, unsure, unstable, wobbly, living somewhere between confusion, discovery, and conviction.”⁴³ As many trans narratives attest, the process often begins with the “family laundry hamper.”⁴⁴ What would it be like to wear these clothes, to be treated like the primarily estrogen or testosterone-based organism expected to wear these clothes?⁴⁵ What would it be like to be that organism? Kiki calls it “the curiosity factor.”⁴⁶ “It was a curiosity about being,” McCloskey confirms.⁴⁷ What is it like to want to play with these toys, to be allowed to play with these toys? What is it like to enjoy that hairstyle, to desire that kiss? Why am I not like other boys, other girls? Sometimes this exploration manifests itself as “a fascination with [. . .] otherness” in beings who are supposedly self-same,⁴⁸ at other times as a “searching for clues” about who it is one might become,⁴⁹ and at still other times it signals, according to Coyote, a special “kind of lonel[iness].”⁵⁰

Trans people's developmental curiosity, however, is not limited to the cisheteronormative world. It invariably includes other trans and genderqueer people, fictive or real, present-day or long ago. Trans community and culture becomes and often remains a lodestone of trans people's own curiosity. Krieger, who describes himself as a "Curious George,"⁵¹ recalls being "driven by my own personal curiosity," devouring "everything written about trans lives and experiences: narrative nonfiction books, reportage, journalism, legal documents, health and medical studies, memoirs, diaries, and zines."⁵² Depending on era and geography, the availability of these resources differs. Coyote recalls sneaking peaks at lesbian magazines in a store downtown.⁵³ McCloskey reminisces about her first drag show as a mature adult.⁵⁴ And Valerio tells a humorous, yet painful story of seeing Leslie Lothstein's 1983 book, *Female-to-Male Transsexualism*, in a bookstore window, feeling queasy, walking away, turning around, and telling himself to forget it, before buying it and running home to hide it.⁵⁵ Corazon states simply, "The internet fed my curiosity,"⁵⁶ Timane singles out "Google" and "YouTube."⁵⁷ Sometimes trans people ping each other, as a way to help situate themselves;⁵⁸ at other times, their interest is even keener. Lady Chablis admits to being "more than mildly curious" about "some *fine-ass titties*" her friends had acquired,⁵⁹ while McCloskey recalls peppering other transwomen with questions, "gathering data like some sort of anthropologist."⁶⁰ Likewise, Valerio describes his transmale friendships as "a gender think tank, an unfunded, underground research project driven by an obsessive sense of exploration and ceaseless investigation."⁶¹ Whether tentative or brazen, occasional or committed, secretive or proud, curiosity about trans experiences and communities is a necessary component of trans people's development and survival.

Beyond deconstructing cisheteronormativity and exploring trans communities, trans people also report a generalized curiosity, as if being trans itself requires an ethos of curiosity. Overwhelmingly, trans people talk about their transition and trans life as a journey, a quest. Transition is not the solution to a problem. "Rather than fix a problem," Krieger states, transition involved "my experimentation and uncertainty, my quest to reinvent my body."⁶² Similarly, Valerio writes: "My transition felt like more than simply a medical solution to a personal problem; it soon expanded into an exploration, an erotically charged boundary-crossing, and a risk-filled journey."⁶³ As not a solution to a problem, but a journey, transition involves "exploring,"⁶⁴ "experimenting,"⁶⁵ "introspecting,"⁶⁶ "investigating,"⁶⁷ and "adventuring."⁶⁸ In fact, "a gender quest," as Green muses, "is a kind of spiritual question. It is our willful destiny to find that balance, that strength, that peace and logic of the soul [. . .] Each step along the way brought me closer to my own center; each candle I lit in the cave of my own fear brought me clarity and stability."⁶⁹ Underscoring the way in which this journey beyond the self is precisely a movement of returning to the self, Mock describes transition as "a complicated journey of self-discovery that goes way beyond gender and genitalia. My passage was an evolution from me to closer-to-me-ness. It's a journey of self-revelation."⁷⁰ The character of this quest or journey is precisely a long process of "self-discovery,"⁷¹ "evolution,"⁷²

"migration,"⁷³ and "invention."⁷⁴ It involves decades, Ming confirms, of "questioning everything."⁷⁵ Given the endless practice of curiosity implicit in the "trans journey," Aoki muses, "trans" is the perfect word: "the great traveler of the Latinate prefixes, the great explorer and pioneer."⁷⁶

These many testaments to trans curiosity leave no doubt: curiosity functions on both the individual and social level. It is a drive to know—to know physically, intellectually, and experientially—but always within a social milieu and therefore in dialogue with inherited structures of value, theoretical frameworks, and a complex *habitus*. Trans authors describe this dynamic in microcosm with respect to their childhoods. Lady Chablis, for example, recalls the vibrancy of her personal "curiosity," which led her as a child, day after day, to sketch her name into oak leaves, drop them in a stream behind her house, and travel with them "to other worlds within my 'magination."⁷⁷ Some trans curiosity goes socially unrecognized precisely because its contours or complexion fall outside of certain norms. Chacaby, for instance, only came to recognize her own curiosity through her grandmother. "When other people called me weird or poisonous," she writes, "[my grandmother] would tell me that I was curious and smart in ways that some people did not understand."⁷⁸ When neither left to flourish nor lost to social recognition, trans curiosity can be purposefully suppressed. For Corazon, childhood is the graveyard of her curiosity, a time when her curiosity was stolen through sexual assault and transphobia. It is only now, as an adult, that she "crave[s] the curiosity of a child"⁷⁹ and vows to live her gender journey in a way that honors that lost possibility. Because curiosity expresses itself across the fabric of self and society, it can be nurtured or occluded, championed or stolen. And because trans people (and particularly trans youth) fall between the cracks of social values, their curiosity is more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of custom and policy, not to mention the whims of individual actors, for better and for worse.⁸⁰

As it appears in trans memoirs, however, trans curiosity is not simply an affect or a feeling, caught in the nexus of norm enforcement, on the one hand, and creative resilience, on the other. Trans curiosity is also a practice that stretches beyond states of consciousness and into objects, architectures, and organized matter: the very stuff of the universe. When trans people change their clothing, it is not simply that curiosity takes them to the laundry hamper or to the department store. Curiosity is the act of standing in the dressing room eyeing oneself, sometimes gingerly at first and then with pride. It is marking how and where the clothes hit, that first day one wears a new piece. When trans people change their name, it is not simply that curiosity suggests perhaps one might go by something else. Curiosity is telling one's confidants, hearing one's new name as friend and stranger all in one, standing awkwardly before a judge. When trans people search for their people and their history, it is not simply that curiosity suggests one read Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* or Janet Mock's *Redefining Realness*. Curiosity is holding it in one's hands, keeping it in one's pillowcase or on one's nightstand, buying a copy for one's parent. When trans people seek out medical interventions, it is not simply that curiosity leads one to the pharmacy or the operating table. Curiosity

is tracking with a mixture of wonder, fear, and hope the minute changes in one's body schema. And all of this happens within a political framework of inherited gender norms, histories of trans resistance to those norms, and as yet unimagined possibilities. The practice of trans curiosity is not a momentary, spontaneously generated question, nor is it an innate force untouched by social context; rather, it is a series of material, intergenerational, and transhuman acts of exploration.

In sum, if trans autobiographical writings suggest anything for the socio-political philosophy of curiosity, it is this: Where an objectifying curiosity denies trans people the complexity and mobility of human subjects, freezing them in a state of whatness, a liberatory curiosity opens up the possibility of nuance, change, and transformation coincident with the whoness of trans people. Given this complexity, it is not enough simply to denigrate or to celebrate curiosity. Before following Timane's recommendation that we add another letter to the LGBTQQIA moniker: a "C" for "curious,"⁸¹ a sustained examination of the styles and stakes of curiosity—including trans curiosity—is necessary. Curiosity as an affect and a set of practices, at once individual and collective, has to be subject to ethico-political evaluation.

IV. TRANS CURIOSITY AS PRAXIS

The rich record of trans curiosity has been almost completely occluded, experientially and theoretically, by the objectifying curiosity to which trans people are subjected. As trans people, sometimes the burn of the gaze and the sting of the question is so sharp as to make one forget that one, too, looks and queries, beckons and explores. It is perhaps, then, no surprise that, within trans studies, the discourse surrounding curiosity remains a critique of objectifying curiosity, with little attempt to reclaim curiosity, as *such*, for trans people.⁸² Given its capacity to turn something into a spectacle, to freeze and immobilize it for the purposes of the inquirer, thereby dehistoricizing, decontextualizing, and dehumanizing it, curiosity plays a clear role in the representational totalization of trans people, their reduction to whats, and to their specific body parts (or lack thereof). But, given its corollary capacity to open perspective and possibility, curiosity also plays an undeniably integral role in trans people's resistant detotalization, their claim to who, to wholeness, to community, and to history. Trans memoirs, moreover, demonstrate that *both* potentialities of curiosity are traceable in affects as well as practices, at individual and social levels.

Trans people—and trans writers and scholars in particular—have already gone to great lengths to diagnose the objectifying curiosity to which they are subject, as well as recommend strategies for change within cisheteronormative worlds. What I offer here is but a gesture. The analysis above might prompt individuals to reflect phenomenologically on whether they take trans people as objects of their curiosity. Do they reduce trans people to the latter's genital status or story? Do they imagine trans people as strange, washed-out aliens in an otherwise rich, familiar landscape? It might also prompt individuals to reflect genealogically on why and how they find trans people curious. What political values and investments, local idiosyncrasies and global trends,

have trained their affects in this way? It might push people to hold themselves accountable for their objectifying curiosity. How, for example, would their immediate reactions to genderqueer kids change if they recognized how much these kids are already overburdened with the stares of strangers, pestering questions, and reductive jokes? How might their tactics for self-education around trans issues change if they acknowledged that trans people have a long and rich history, replete with changing subcultures? Finally, it might also push people to collectively reevaluate how these affects, habits, investments, and practices are embedded in material and discursive structures. That is, how is trans-objectifying curiosity institutionalized in the media, medicine, and education, as well as public and private spaces? And how might the very function of internet clickbait, digital databases, IRB standards, and airport surveillance, for example, become trans-affirming, even trans-humanizing?

And yet, as I have argued, trans people are not only the objects but the subjects of curiosity, not merely the brunt but practitioners of curiosity. What further lessons are to be learned here? Insofar as trans people are curious, trans objecthood is untenable. That is, if curiosity is a capacity of a human subject,⁸³ then trans curiosity defeats—or gives the lie to—trans objecthood. As a tactic for repositioning trans people in the realm of human subjectivity, then, reclaiming trans curiosity is valuable. Nevertheless, such a tactic unfortunately does nothing to change existing structures of value and privilege predicated upon said human subjectivity, including those tied to the notions of Enlightenment rationality, individualism, and Anthropocentrism. While it will ultimately be important to recognize other grounds for trans liberation, still more can be drawn from reflections on trans personhood. Indeed, insofar as trans people in general are curious, individual trans people are curious, often in unique, idiosyncratic ways. How might trans curiosity modulate by geography and era, social group and social standing, or along the axes of gender, sexuality, disability, or socioeconomic status? How might attention to the racialization of curiosity, for example, demand the very reconceptualization of the subject/object divide? In what ways could all of these differences be better recognized, and in some cases celebrated, in and beyond the trans community? And how might attending to this variability necessarily demand posthuman or transhuman coalitions?

But the praxis of trans curiosity, with all its material and discursive effects, promises more than a subsumption of thing into human. It provides new ways of thinking about cultures of curiosity and their liberatory potential. Consider the sociopolitical function of the practices, forms, and configurations of curiosity generated in trans communities. By engaging curiosity as a practice of political imagination, the kinesthetic signatures of trans curiosity pose an implicit challenge to the everyday paradigms of curiosity common today. Consider, first, the trans practice of second-guessing cisheteronormative expectations of clothing, play, roles, and desires. This constitutes, at least, a strand of curiosity that makes the familiar strange. Second, the practice of finding trans places, people, culture, and community signals, again at least, the sort of curiosity that

seeks out subjugated knowledges and embodiments, or even subjugated knowledges as embodiments. Third, the practice of taking a gender journey—including questing, exploring, introspecting, investigating, and experimenting—is a style of curiosity that self-creates. What if these sorts, strands, and styles of curiosity—this family of curious practices—were the paradigmatic acts of curiosity? That is, what if the word curiosity signaled not a violent inquisition, an objectifying gaze, or an inane question? What if it called to mind not value-neutral science, media obsession, or useless trivia? Indeed, what if curiosity signaled, instead, this trio of habits: making the familiar strange, searching out subjugated knowledges, and cultivating a life of purposeful experimentation and authentic engagement in the project of self-creation in community? This honest, harrowing, exuberant quest. What if these were the practices given preference in the thought of curiosity? Trans curiosity does just this.

Attending to curiosity as a praxis, or set of practices, which are each subject to ethico-political evaluation is a necessary supplement to the classical interpretation of curiosity as an innate human capacity to desire knowledge. It is certainly important for individual differences in the expressions of curiosity to be recognized and for individual people to be accountable for their own expressions. But that is not enough. Insofar as curiosity as a praxis can belong to human collectives, networks of human and nonhuman things, as well as non-desiring materials, this supplemental model helps to explain how trans-objectifying curiosity is embedded in architectures and institutions, in multimedia and digital platforms. From this perspective, curiosity is an inquisitive movement within an ecological fabric. But what are the grounds for choosing some curious practices over others? Surely the practices of defamiliarization, desubjugation, and self-creation in community are not good simply by virtue of being practiced by trans subjects, by marginalized subjects, or by resistant subjects. Or because they embody some abstract notion of justice. Instead, they are good by virtue of fashioning space for life under exclusionary conditions, a function which may or may not be present in particular trans, marginalized, or resistant subjects' actions or perspectives. Thus, rather than demanding a whyless treatment or laying claim to the human condition, I suggest that trans curiosity opens up a space through which to think curiosity as a practice of socio-political resistance. It provides a model of curiosity that at once combats and deploys transhuman assemblages, and creatively breaks and rebuilds transhuman embodiments. More fundamentally, trans curiosity theorizes, in its very resistant praxis, new styles and frameworks for the study of curiosity itself.

NOTES

1. Ryka Aoki, *Seasonal Velocities* (Los Angeles: TransGenre Press, 2012), 57.
2. *Ibid.*, 124.
3. Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" (1987), in *The Transgender Studies Reader I*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 232.
4. *Ibid.*, 229.

5. *Ibid.*, 230.
6. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), 1.
7. *Ibid.*, 2.
8. Erich Pitcher, *Being and Becoming Professionally Other: Identities, Voices, and Experiences of US Trans* Academics* (New York: Peter Lang, 2017).
9. Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics & the Limits of Law* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Stephen Whittle, *Respect and Equality: Transsexual and Transgender Rights* (London: Cavendish, 2002).
10. Reina Gossett and Eric Stanley, eds., *Trap Door: Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* (Boston: MIT Press, 2017).
11. See, for example, Perry Zurn, "Curiosities at War: The Police and Prison Resistance After May '68," *Modern and Contemporary France* 26, no. 2 (2018): 179–91.
12. John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. John William Adamson (1693; New York: Dover, 2007), §118.
13. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (1762; New York: Basic Books: 1979), 167.
14. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1874), in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), §6.
15. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense" (1873), in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, eds. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), §1.
16. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1970).
17. Michel Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 1997), 325.
18. See Perry Zurn, "Busybody, Hunter, Dancer: Three Historico-Philosophical Models of Curiosity," in *Curious about Curiosity: Toward New Philosophical Explorations of the Desire to Know*, ed. Marianna Papastefanou (Cambridge Scholars Press, forthcoming).
19. Rae Spoon and Ivan Coyote, *Gender Failure* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014), 110.
20. Jamison Green, *Becoming a Visible Man* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 35.
21. *Ibid.*, 182.
22. *Ibid.*, 21.
23. *Ibid.*, 17.
24. Ivan Coyote, *Tomboy Survival Guide* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016), 132.
25. Green, *Becoming a Visible Man*, 37.
26. Jennifer Boylan, *She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders* (New York: Broadway Books, 2013), 22.
27. Coyote, *Tomboy Survival Guide*, 109.
28. Green, *Becoming a Visible Man*, 207–208.
29. Carol Riddell, "Divided Sisterhood: A Critical Review of Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire*," in *Transgender Studies Reader I*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 145.
30. Spoon and Coyote, *Gender Failure*, 223.
31. S. Orchard, "Questions," *DUDE Magazine* 1 (2011): 26; Lei Ming, *Life Beyond My Body* (Oakland: Transgress Press, 2016), 145–46.
32. See also Lovemme Carazon, *Trauma Queen* (Toronto: Biyuti publishing, 2013), 177–78; The Lady Chablis, *Hiding My Candy* (New York: Pocket Books, 1996), 102; Sarah McBride, *Tomorrow Will Be Different* (New York: Crown, 2018), 53, 178; Ming, *Life Beyond My Body*, 62–63.
33. Carazon, *Trauma Queen*, 128–29.

34. See also McBride, *Tomorrow Will Be Different*, 26–30; Janet Mock, *Surpassing Certainty: What My Twenties Taught Me* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 135–36.
35. Janet Mock, *Redefining Realness* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 181; Rob Pusch, "Objects of Curiosity: Transgender College Students' Perceptions of the Reactions of Others," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education* 3, no. 1 (2015): 45–61.
36. Green, *Becoming a Visible Man*, 10; Deidre McCloskey, *Crossing: A Memoir* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 100, 134.
37. Talia Mae Bettcher, "Response to Hypatia Controversy over 'In Defense of Transracialism,'" *Learning Trans* blog, May 6, 2017, <https://learningtrans.org/2017/05/06/talia-bettcher-response-to-hypatia-coontroversy-over-in-defense-of-transracialism/>.
38. Amy Marvin, "Transsexuality, the Curio, and the Transgender Tipping Point," in *Curiosity Studies: Toward a New Ecology of Knowledge*, eds. Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming).
39. Green, *Becoming a Visible Man*, 191–92.
40. Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back," 229.
41. Viviane Namaste, "Undoing Theory: The 'Transgender Question' and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminist Theory," *Hypatia* 24, no. 3 (2009): 11–32.
42. C. Jacob Hale, "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans___," accessed December 26, 2017, <https://sandystone.com/hale.rules.html>.
43. Mock, *Redefining Realness*, 16.
44. Vicki, "Dear Kim," *FMI (Female Mimics International)* 21, no. 5 (1992): 15.
45. Virginia Price, "Masculinity—Femininity—Androgyny," *Fantasia Fair Symposium* (Provincetown, MA: 1977), 15.
46. Kiki, "Dressing-up According to Kiki," *Chi Chanter Tribune* 37, no. 6 (June 1998): 2.
47. McCloskey, *Crossing: A Memoir*, 6.
48. Max Valerio, *The Testosterone Files: My Hormonal and Social Transformation from Female to Male* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2006), 43.
49. Coyote, *Tomboy Survival Guide*, 103.
50. *Ibid.*, 33.
51. Nick Krieger, *Nina Here Nor There* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 28, cp. 29, 61, 69.
52. Nick Krieger, "Writing Trans," in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community*, ed. Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 583.
53. Spoon, in Spoon and Coyote, *Gender Failure*, 48.
54. McCloskey, *Crossing: A Memoir*, 9.
55. Valerio, *The Testosterone Files*, 77–78.
56. Lovemme Corazon, *Trauma Queen* (Biyuti Publishing, 2013), 32.
57. Rizi Xavier Timane, *An Unspoken Promise* (Createspace Independent publishing, 2013), 55.
58. Valerio, *The Testosterone Files*, 109.
59. Chablis, *Hiding My Candy*, 87.
60. McCloskey, *Crossing: A Memoir*, 31.
61. Valerio, *The Testosterone Files*, 181.
62. Krieger, "Writing Trans," 583.
63. Valerio, *The Testosterone Files*, 10. Cp. Lucas Crawford, "Transgender without Organs? Mobilizing a Geo-Affective Theory of Gender," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3-4 (2008): 139.
64. Corazon, *Trauma Queen*, 85; Green, *Becoming a Visible Man*, 90; Mock, *Redefining Realness*, 23; Ming, *Life Beyond My Body*, 89; Timane, *An Unspoken Compromise*, 78; Valerio, *The Testosterone Files*, 10.
65. Corazon, *Trauma Queen*, 204; Krieger, "Writing Trans," 583; Green, *Becoming a Visible Man*, 216; Mock, *Redefining Realness*, 23; Valerio, *The Testosterone Files*, 193.
66. Green, *Becoming a Visible Man*, 216.
67. Valerio, *The Testosterone Files*, 10.
68. Ming, *Life Beyond My Body*, 41, 146; Valerio, *The Testosterone Files*, 10.
69. Green, *Becoming a Visible Man*, 215.
70. Mock, *Redefining Realness*, 227.
71. Talia Mae Bettcher, "The Phenomenology of Empersonation: What Transphobia Shows about Transition," Keynote Address, Southwest Seminar in Continental Philosophy, June 9, 2017; Mock, *Redefining Realness*, 16, 50, 227; Ming, *Life Beyond My Body*, 1.
72. Mock, *Redefining Realness*, 227, 258.
73. *Ibid.*, 258.
74. Coyote, *Tomboy Survival Guide*, 133, 171; cp. Krieger, "Writing Trans," 583.
75. Ming, *Life Beyond My Body*, 16; cp. Timane, *An Unspoken Compromise*, 55, 57.
76. Aoki, *Seasonal Velocities*, 54.
77. Lady Chablis, *Hiding My Candy*, 41.
78. Ma-Nee Chacaby, *A Two-Spirit Journey*, 19; cp. Ming, *Life Beyond My Body*, 63.
79. Corazon, *Trauma Queen*, 202.
80. For a powerful account of the radical suppression of one trans child's curiosity, see Gayle Salamon, *The Life and Death of Latisha King* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).
81. Timane, *An Unspoken Compromise*, 143.
82. The notable exception to this rule is Eliza Steinbock's essay, "Groping Theory: Haptic Cinema and Trans-Curiosity in Hans Scheirl's *Dandy Dust*," in *The Transgender Studies Reader I*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 101–18.
83. For resources for thinking curiosity beyond the human, see Perry Zurn, "The Curiosity at Work in Deconstruction," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2018): 65–87.

Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, and Phenomenological Forays in Trans Life

Tamsin Kimoto
EMORY UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Recent articles and books on transgender phenomena have explored a variety of the experiences of trans people, but relatively few scholars working in trans studies deploy the language and tools provided by phenomenology or use trans experience to challenge and rework text in the history of phenomenology. One notable exception is the work of Gayle Salamon,¹ who explicitly draws on trans phenomena and describes them in the terms put forward by thinkers in the phenomenological canon.

My own work in this paper is in a similar vein. In particular, I use the tools of Merleau-Ponty and Fanon to describe two key experiences in the lives of many trans people: the experience of hormonal transition and the experience of

transphobia. Given the wide variety of experiences of each of these, I can only offer partial pictures here and draw heavily on my own lived experience of both. My aim in attending to each of these experiences is to demonstrate the ways in which taking trans people's lived experiences seriously ought to reorient our understanding of what it means to be an embodied subject.

There are two parts to this paper. In the first, I use some of Merleau-Ponty's work to describe the experience of hormonal transition. In the second, I use Fanon's work to take up the experience of being subject to transphobic violence by focusing on how our typical understandings of those events, and their tacit justification in law, privilege what I call here a genital-sexual schema.

MERLEAU-PONTY AND A PHENOMENOLOGY OF HORMONAL TRANSITION²

While not determinant of one's trans status, hormonal transition is nevertheless an interesting site of inquiry for trans phenomenology. We can understand intentionality very basically as the fact that consciousness is always being conscious or aware of objects in our environment; thus, intentionality refers to the ways in which our attention is directed at or away from particular objects in our environment.³ By looking at how it is that we move in the world, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates how our movements in the world constitute a mode of consciousness.⁴ These perceptions, therefore, are not always chosen in the way that a purely reflective understanding of intentionality might hold.⁵

One way that we might also understand this is through the Merleau-Pontean terms of the body schema and the body image. Recall that, for Merleau-Ponty, the body schema refers to the experience of the body's possibilities in a spatial and temporal world.⁶ This experience is one that is not reflective in nature; rather, it seems to be best understood through the performance, and over time the habitual performance, of actions in the world.⁷ The body schema is the body's intentionality precisely because it refers to a way of being directed or of moving in relation to other objects in the world. The body image, on the other hand, is specifically reflective and refers to the ways in which we conceive of our bodies and their possibilities in the world when we actually think about them.

The most obvious effect of HRT on our bodies is the way in which it can serve to reconfigure our body image. Many trans people experience dysphoria, a kind of psychic distress that occurs when our bodies do not align with our expectations of them in terms of their particularly gendered characteristics.⁸ HRT alters body image by actually reshaping the body in various ways and thus also our cognitive apprehension of our own bodies and their possibilities.⁹ Our conscious perceptions of these changes on our bodies and the ways they shift our senses of our embodied possibilities necessarily transforms our body image. Developing breast tissue, and my attending to that, has shifted my sense of my body's possibilities in relation to how I can move in certain clothing or whether running without discomfort is possible. This is a shift in body image

precisely because my reflexive intentions, those ways in which my body intends possibility without consciously attending to it, do not always align with my reflective perception of my body's possibilities.

The body schema is also reworked during HRT. In his memoir-cum-critical inquiry, Paul Preciado describes the ways in which taking testosterone destabilized his ways of moving in the world without his conscious assent to those changes.¹⁰ Our bodies begin to perceive the world around us differently than they did before we began HRT. Developing breast tissue, for example, has affected even my more reflexive actions. In the world, I find myself moving through crowds differently than I had before because my body has become alert to the possibility of an errant elbow appearing in my path. This does not require any kind of conscious effort on my part, but it is connected to experiences of having elbows and other hard objects impact budding breast tissue. Experiences of pain have shifted my body's reflexive actions in the world directly as an effect of HRT.¹¹

Perhaps the most obvious ways in which body image and body schema come together in the process of HRT is in our erotic encounters. Merleau-Ponty describes what he calls a "sexual schema" in which he notes that our perceptual experiences are tinged by sexuality in a way that crosses the easy division between body image and body schema. The sexual schema seems to refer both to our sense of our own body's possibilities and the possibilities of others' bodies and the performances of certain bodily actions and their habituation.¹² An awareness of the other, then, is an awareness of the other's body and its possibilities, and this is equally true of our own bodies.

In addition to realigning the appearance of our bodies, HRT also realigns how we feel our bodies. Estrogen softens our skin and makes it more sensitive to external stimuli, like the feel of certain fabrics or the touch of another. The erotogenic zones on my body have shifted over the last several months due to an increased sensitivity across the surface of my body. At the same time, however, my reflexive perception of a situation as potentially erotic has also shifted such that a state of active arousal occurs less frequently. HRT, then, has shifted my cognitive and non-cognitive perceptions of my own body and the environment in which it finds itself specifically in the ways that sexuality does or does not appear as part of my perceptual experiences.

HRT, especially its erotic aspects, occurs in the context of other bodily shifts. In his poem "Queer Poetics: How to Make Love to a Trans Person," Gabe Moses stages an imagined erotic encounter between the reader and a trans person and implores us to reimagine the body before us by "break[ing] open the words" like "cock" or "clit" so that they correspond to our imagined partner's gender rather than how we might otherwise understand those terms. Moses's provocation in his poem is to read and encounter the trans body before us in this imagined erotic encounter as one laden with possibility rather than delimited by the presence or absence of certain bodily features.¹³ Talia Bettcher refers to this as "recoding." On Bettcher's account, recoding involves the imagined reconfiguration

and reconceptualization of the body in order to experience them as sites of erotic pleasure.¹⁴ For example, a trans woman might recode her penis as a clitoris in order to experience oral sex as cunnilingus.

What is significant about these experiences of HRT and body recoding for my purposes here is that they both point to ways in which a body is reworked in the experience of transition. Due to the accumulation of habit, the social context in which we find ourselves, and the capacities that appear to us in our own bodies, we develop a particular understanding, both cognitive and non-cognitive, of them over time that presents itself as merely given. Transition demonstrates ways in which the organization of our bodies is not merely given to us; rather, what transition shows is that our bodies become organized largely as they are because we do not often attend to them as malleable. The organization of a “developed” body appears to us as a mostly natural fact, but transition relies on actively reworking our bodily intentions in a way that both denaturalizes our habits and reconfigures our relations with the world through which we move and act. Transition, then, is a way of putting the body into disarray such that a more or less complete reconfiguration of it appears as a possibility.

FANONIAN SCHEMAS AND A PHENOMENOLOGY OF TRANSPHOBIA

In writing about the lived experience of the Black man, Frantz Fanon makes a series of provocative statements that I want to think with and through in this section of the paper. I am particularly interested in the Fanonian schemas that he articulates in the beginning of Chapter 5 of *Black Skin, White Masks*: the historical racial schema and the epidermal racial schema. I want to be clear here that, by juxtaposing Fanon’s phenomenological descriptions of the experiences of Black men under conditions of colonialism with the work of trans phenomenologists, I am not supposing that these experiences are identical. Rather, what is of central interest to me is the way in which Fanon and trans phenomenological theory rework, rewrite, and retheorize what it means to be embodied in the world; there are, I hope, promising insights in each that we can use to develop the other further. I will do this by pairing readings of Fanon with some reflections on transness to elaborate what I am tentatively proposing here as a genital-sexual schema. Fanon writes,

In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The image of one’s body is solely negating. It’s an image in the third person. . . . Beneath the body schema I had created a historical-racial schema. The data I used were provided . . . by the Other, the white man who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories. I thought I was being asked to construct a physiological self, to balance space and localize sensations, when all the time they were clamoring for more. . . . As a result, the body schema, attacked in several places, collapsed, giving way to an epidermal racial schema.¹⁵

There are at least three ways to read this passage, so I will describe each briefly in turn. First, we might, especially given my earlier reliance on Merleau-Ponty, be tempted to read this passage merely as a rejoinder to the Merleau-Pontean schematization of the body. On this account, what Fanon is up to amounts more or less to a correction of the relatively abstract body in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological account, a reminder that race matters for any theory of embodiment or of the body. This is, I think, a fairly impoverished reading of Fanon that reduces him to the status of critic of phenomenology rather than a critical phenomenologist in his own right.

There is, I think, a similar worry when we think about something like a phenomenology of transness—to assume that trans phenomenologists are simply doing the work of correcting mistakes in the phenomenological canon. What is at stake, then, might be a revision of the Merleau-Pontean body schema/body image, perhaps reinforcing our fundamentally intersubjective and historically situated embodiment. But it might also be a challenge to what Merleau-Ponty and others in the phenomenological canon are up to—demonstrating the assumptions undergirding his work that people who belong to dominant identity groups along axes of identity are, as Christine Wieseler puts it in her recent interview with Shelley Tremain, “normal” and render the rest of us “pathological.”¹⁶ The entanglements of body image and schema in transition suggest that the division that interpreters of Merleau-Ponty like Shaun Gallagher want to uphold is troubled when we consider more critically the body at stake in phenomenology.

Another way to read Fanon is as articulating a retheorization of the body by looking to how it is that we interpret our own bodies or encounter them as interpreted by others. On this account, what Fanon shows us is that the moment of direct perceptual access even to our own bodies is mediated through the inherited and sedimented conceptual world we inhabit: “On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object.”¹⁷ For the Black man, living under the effects of colonialism and white supremacy has the curious effect of interrupting his own access to his body or his ability to articulate it in ways that are not overdetermined by the accumulated data about bodies like his own. Indeed, this accumulation of data has the effect, in turn, of causing him to objectify his own bodily existence to such an extent that recovering a subject position is fraught at best. We can think here about the ways in which, for example, police who murder Black people describe the actual bodies of those they kill: larger than life, endowed with supernatural ability, monstrous. Under such conditions, Fanon makes clear, the idea that we have direct perceptual access to our own bodies is naïve or even misleading.

Phenomenological work in trans studies forces us to ask similar questions about the status of the body in our work and how we are thinking about the possibility of direct perceptual access to our own bodies in ways that are not overdetermined by oppressive epistemic and metaphysical frameworks. Talia Bettcher has attended to the phenomenon

of body “recoding” in trans people’s sexual experiences. Because of the particular relations to embodiment that trans persons have (i.e., negotiating a body that is not as one would wish it or as social custom indicates it ought to be for a given gender alignment), many must engage in “coding,” which is the imaginary reconfiguration of bodily features (e.g., genitals, breasts) or sexual prostheses (e.g., strap-on dildos, artificial nails).¹⁸ The process of learning to read or reread our bodies is akin to the process of struggling to find one’s own subject position that Fanon describes. As trans people, we often find ourselves stumbling over the language we have inherited for describing our own bodies. How, for example, to describe a body that was assigned male in a way that does not assume the assignment was correct—that it named a male body—while at the same time leaving open the possibility of speaking of our own particular bodies.

One final way to read Fanon’s schemas that I consider here is as a rearticulation of intersubjectivity and something like embodiment in its most broad sense. He writes, “In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. . . . I existed triply: I occupied space. . . . I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors.”¹⁹ This tripling of self seems to reflect each of the schemas he has addressed in the text thus far: the body schema, the epidermal-racial schema, and the historical-racial schema, to each of which he bears some sort of responsibility. While living under conditions of pervasive anti-Blackness, Black men are made to stand in for both all other living Black men and all of those who have come before them. This latter standing in, the historical-racial schema, carries with it the histories of racist beliefs and frameworks that dehumanize Black men and deny them the status of full humanity or subjectivity proper. The former, which would seem to be the epidermal-racial schema, reduces the Black man to his interchangeability with any other given Black man. Insofar as skin becomes determinant of who he is, then his own body and his own particularity recede into the background. The account of embodiment at stake here, then, is one that understands the body and embodiment as actually constituted both spatially *and* historically—such an account is also thoroughly saturated with the social and political such that an individual body or an individual’s embodiment is not easily isolatable.

One way to see how we might deploy this Fanonian theory of embodiment is to look at the trans panic defense and transphobia. A panic defense, usually specified as either gay or trans, is a legal defense strategy used in situations in which the victim of a violent crime, often murder, is said to have engaged in a behavior that justifies the response of the person or persons responsible for the crime. It is used, especially in cases where the victim was killed, to downgrade the crime from a felony murder to a form of voluntary manslaughter. The sort of behavior that might be considered to justify such a violent response tends to fall into one of two categories: (1) the victim is said to have misconstrued their gender by presenting in a way that is incongruent with their genital status, or to have deliberately hidden in some other way their genital status, only for that status to be revealed and shock the perpetrator of the

crime into violent action; or (2) the victim is said to have engaged in unwelcome romantic or erotic behavior with the perpetrator while openly presenting a gender identity and/or genital status that does not align with the recipient’s sexual identity as determined by the genital object (e.g., a penis or a vagina) of their sexual desires. The term first emerged into public discourse following the murder of the young trans woman Gwen Araujo in 2002. To date, the state of California is the only state within the United States to ban explicitly the use of panic defenses; in all other jurisdictions, it remains a very real possibility.

Trans feminist philosopher Talia Bettcher gives a detailed account of the trans panic defense in her 2007 article entitled “Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers.”²⁰ I will only briefly describe here the arguments she makes in the article, but they should serve to demonstrate how the panic defense reflects the broader understanding of trans people in US society. She argues that what undergirds the legal viability of trans panic is the presence of the pervasive belief that trans persons engage in practices that are deceptive to the wider public. These deceptive practices are those that reflect a disjunction between the “appearance” involved in a gendered presentation and the “reality” involved in a sexed body; the belief that this is a disjunction and therefore a kind of deception reflects what she calls, following sexologist Harold Garfinkel, the “natural attitude about gender.”²¹ The natural attitude about gender is simply the notion that one’s gendered presentation—that is, one’s dress, mannerisms, and other modes of engaging the world—reflects a particular genital status; thus, if one presents in a way that is consistent with the ways of those we designate as women, then one’s genitalia, for example, should consist of the vagina and those bodily features we expect to accompany the presence of a vagina. A penis or its revelation as part of the body of a person who presented as a woman, then, represents a kind of deception to a person engaged in the natural attitude about gender.

As an alternative to deception, a trans person might also disclose their trans status up-front and declare that their presentation does not align with their genital status in the way that most would expect. However, as Bettcher notes, such a revelation does little to alter the fundamental notion that a deception is still at work; the deception might simply take on the less morally weighted notion of pretend: “For in coming out, she [Gwen Araujo] would have no doubt been interpreted as ‘really a boy who dressed up like a girl.’”²² In order to demonstrate the accuracy of such a prediction, one need only consider the many responses to Caitlyn Jenner’s coming out as trans, which include a wide number of people who continue to refer to her as “Bruce,” a he, and explicitly deny that she could be considered a woman at all, or the work of any number of radical feminists who make similar claims. Disclosure of one’s status as trans does little to mitigate the fact of deception; it merely makes the deception a kind of imaginary game in which we all know the real “truth” about that person’s gender identity.

On Bettcher’s account, what the dominant reading of transgender as a misalignment between gender presentation and genital status demonstrates is that gender presentation is taken to have a kind of truth value on the basis of which

one can be said to present themselves truthfully or falsely. Trans people, then, in a cisnormative society do engage, according to Bettcher, in a kind of deceptive practice insofar as the natural attitude about gender aligns presentation and body in a way that privileges the presentations and bodies of cis persons. Given that this is the case, we cannot simply construe the label of “deceiver” as “inexplicable or bizarre stereotypes used against transpeople.”²³ Any attempt to do so fails to engage adequately the lived realities of being trans in the United States, and effective change in the circumstances of trans people, and especially trans women of color, will need to be able to respond to these realities precisely because either model, deception or pretending, makes possible and legitimates the deployment of the trans panic defense.

The relatively unchallenged legitimacy of the trans panic defense leads to a heightened sense of precarity and exposure among trans people. The possibility of being subject to violence, the awareness of that possibility, and the understanding that such violence would likely go unpunished appear throughout the memoirs and autobiographies of trans people. There are similarities worth exploring between these experiences and the lived experience of the Black man that Fanon offers us. In both cases, we run into the problem of a mismatch between our own first-person experiences and the way in which we are read through inherited and sedimented epistemological and metaphysical frameworks that “code” our bodies in such a way that our own ability to perceive them may be diminished. Rather, though, than an epidermal-racial schema, what we seem to have in the case of trans people is something akin to a genital-sexual schema. Whereas skin color and features on the surface of the body become a primary mark of the Black man’s otherness and the most immediate site of his reduction to object, for trans people, it is often our genitals or the histories of our genitals that become the site of both objectification and otherness.²⁴ Similarly, the awareness of this genital-sexual schema has a direct affect on the embodied possibilities and perceptions of trans people due to an intensified awareness of how our bodies might be read by others.

For trans women living under the threat of trans panic, this presents the following situation: one must present in ways that read as woman in all situations in order to avoid a particular sort of scrutiny that might reveal a sexed body that “misaligns” with one’s gender presentation. Yawning in a particular way, for example, might cause a man to look twice where he may not have otherwise; this may not even be conscious on his part, and it may simply be that the yawn, in combination with other motions or past events, might cause him to notice the trans woman before him in a way that he had not before. This is a kind of experience of the figure/background relationship that Merleau-Ponty describes in his phenomenology. The “figure” should be understood to name whatever object or objects we are attending to in a given perceptual experience, while the background is the field against which that figure appears; these are not inherent properties of objects because different objects can become figures while others recede to background as our intentional awareness shifts.²⁵ What makes an object figure as opposed to background is the

extent to which it is attended to by the perceiver. For many trans women, then, one’s ability to present successfully as a woman can be read as an attempt to remain background in the perceptual experiences of heterosexual men or to present as figure in a certain way; both of these are strategies to avoid being subject to the transphobic violence that trans panic makes possible.

NOTES

1. See *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); and *The Life and Death of Latisha King: A Critical Phenomenology of Transphobia* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).
2. While my primary goal in this section is to present a phenomenology of transition, moving directly into a particular account of transness without contextualizing it at least a little within the contemporary situation of trans people in the United States would be a mistake. A number of recent studies on anti-LGBT violence, both in the United States and abroad, point to the overrepresentation of trans women and trans femmes of color among the victims of this violence. This dynamic is best captured in the phenomena that Dean Spade (2015) describes as “administrative violence.” Very basically, administrative violence captures those ways in which the state’s administration of gender conducts its own violence while also producing and maintaining the conditions for myriad other acts and practices of violence. As an example of this, we might consider, as Spade does, the various ways in which legal identification documents administrate gender. In the United States, one is assigned a designation of either M or F at birth, and this designation has very real effects on one’s life. For trans people, the designation can often be a serious hurdle in transition processes. The federal government has specific policies for changing these designations, and each state has its own as well. This creates the very real and common occurrence that one might be attempting to change these documents while navigating at least three different ways of administrating gender.
3. Ronald McIntyre and David Woodruff Smith, “Theory of Intentionality,” *Husserl’s Phenomenology*, ed. J. N. Mohanty and William McKenna (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1989): 147–79. While this sounds entirely reflective, later phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty rework intentionality to refer also to the ways in which our bodies are or are not aware of their environment.
4. Charles Siewert, “Consciousness and Intentionality,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness-intentionality/>.
5. Indeed, many of our bodily actions and perceptions in the world are conditioned in ways of which we are not consciously aware.
6. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. David Landes (New York: Routledge, 2014): 142–43.
7. Shaun Gallagher, “Body Image and Body Schema: A Conceptual Clarification,” *The Journal of Mind and Behavior* 7, no. 4 (1989): 541–54.
8. Common sites for dysphoria are facial hair or breasts: a trans man, for example, might experience dysphoria as a result of possessing large breasts. Dysphoria is rarely a permanent state; instead, it occurs more frequently as a result of attending to our bodies in a particular way or in response to certain stimuli. Being stared at might trigger dysphoria if it seems that the stares result from being perceived as “not really a man” or “possessing too much facial hair to be a woman.”
9. In HRT aimed at feminization, for example, one takes both testosterone blockers and estrogen, which, to varying degrees and at varying paces, causes breast growth, shifts the accumulation of body fat to the hips and thighs, decreases body hair, and a number of other bodily changes. Interestingly, one bodily change that many trans women experience as a result of HRT that is not well-documented in the medical literature on the subject is the development of something like a menstrual cycle (sans menstruation itself) after several months of taking hormones: <https://theestablishment.co/yes-trans-women-can-get-period-symptoms-e43a43979e8c>. This phenomenon is rarely discussed in much of the medical literature and is usually

not discussed as part of an informed consent process when beginning HRT.

10. Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: Feminist Press, 2013).
11. This suggests ways in which body image and body schema are perhaps more in conversation with one another than Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest, but it is very much in line with Iris Young's phenomenological account of the ways in which the movement of girls and women becomes restricted over time. Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Bodily Compartment, Motility, and Spatiality," *Human Studies* 3, no. 2 (1980): 137–56.
12. I claim that the sexual schema has more of a cognitive function than the body schema itself precisely because Merleau-Ponty refers to the sexual schema "accentuating" and "sketching out" features of one's own body and the bodies of others (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 158).
13. It is important to note here that Moses is implicitly drawing on a particular model of trans, one overlaid with the history of dysphoria—not all trans persons will figure their own bodies in this way in which validation of gender is wrapped up in the acknowledgment or avowal of certain bodily features—but I think we can understand this call beyond that particular context. Similarly, while the poem is ostensibly addressed to the lovers of trans persons, we can quite readily imagine that these processes might also be occurring the mind of the trans person.
14. Talia Mae Bettcher, "When Selves Have Sex: What the Phenomenology of Trans Sexuality Can Teach about Sexual Orientation," *Journal of Homosexuality* 61 (2014): 605–20.
15. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox (2008): 110–12.
16. "Dialogues on Disability: Shelley Tremain Interviews Christine Wieseler," *Discrimination and Disadvantage*, March 21, 2018, http://philosophycommons.typepad.com/disability_and_disadvanta/2018/03/dialogues-on-disability-shelley-tremain-interviews-christine-wieseler.html.
17. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 112.
18. Bettcher, "When Selves Have Sex," 610–11.
19. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 112.
20. Talia Mae Bettcher, "Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion," *Hypatia* 22, no. 3 (2007): 43–65.
21. *Ibid.*, 48–49.
22. *Ibid.*, 50.
23. *Ibid.*, 55.
24. Of course, trans people of color may also be subject to the very schemas that Fanon describes in addition to this genital-sexual schema.
25. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 4.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The APA Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy invites members to submit papers, book reviews, and professional notes for publication in the fall 2019 edition. Submissions can address issues in the areas of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, gender, and sexuality studies, as well as issues of concern for LGBTQ people in the profession. The newsletter seeks quality paper submissions for review. Reviews and notes should address recent books, current events, or emerging trends. Members who give papers at APA divisional meetings, in particular, are encouraged to submit their work.

DEADLINE

The deadline for submission of manuscripts for the fall edition is May 1, 2019.

FORMAT

Papers should be in the range of 5,000–6,000 words. Reviews and Notes should be in the range of 1,000–2,000 words. All submissions must use endnotes and should be prepared for anonymous review.

CONTACT

Submit all manuscripts electronically (MS Word), and direct inquiries to Grayson Hunt, Editor, APA Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy, graysonhunt@austin.utexas.edu.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Ami Harbin is an associate professor of philosophy and women and gender studies at Oakland University (Michigan). She is the author of *Disorientation and Moral Life* (Oxford University Press, 2016). Her research focuses on moral psychology, feminist ethics, and bioethics.

Andrea J. Pitts is assistant professor of philosophy at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. Their research interests include critical prison studies, Latin American and US Latinx philosophy, critical philosophy of race, and feminist theory. Their publications appear in *IJFAB: International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics*, *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, *Radical Philosophy Review*, and *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy*. They are also co-editor of *Beyond Bergson: Examining Race and Colonialism through the Writings of Henri Bergson* (SUNY Press 2019).

Perry Zurn is assistant professor of philosophy at American University. He researches broadly in political philosophy, gender theory, and applied ethics, and contributes specifically to critical prison studies and curiosity studies. He is the author of *The Politics of Curiosity* (University of Minnesota Press, under contract), the co-author of *Curious Minds* (MIT Press, under contract), and the co-editor of *Active Intolerance: Michel Foucault, the Prisons Information Group, and the Future of Abolition* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), *Curiosity Studies: Toward a New Ecology of Knowledge* (University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming), *Intolerable: Writings from Michel Foucault and the Prisons Information Group* (University of Minnesota Press, under contract), and *Carceral Notebooks 12*. His articles have appeared in *Carceral Notebooks*, *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, *Modern and Contemporary France*, *philoSOPHIA*, *Radical Philosophy Review*, and *Zetesis*.

Tamsin Kimoto is a PhD student in the philosophy department at Emory University. Their areas of specialization are trans studies and philosophy, Women of Color feminisms, and social and political philosophy. Their current projects include a dissertation on the intersections of utopian political theories and critical trans politics and articles on queer of color critique and the practice of philosophy.