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"You Can't Have Everything . . . Where Would You Put It?": Responding to Tamsin, Javier, Ray, and Amy, and Isobel on Beyond Personhood

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FROM THE EDITORS

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This edition of *APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy* is dedicated to celebrating and carrying forward the work of Talia Mae Bettcher in her 2025 book, *Beyond Personhood: An Essay in Trans Philosophy*. The issue features four invited commentaries on the book—from Amy Marvin and Isobel Bess, Javier Pitts Guzmán, Ray Briggs, and Tamsin Kimoto, respectively—followed by Bettcher's response. We are grateful to Bettcher and her commenters for sharing with us their trans philosophical works—which is more necessary than ever in a political climate of widespread and resounding anti-trans backlash. Considering our contemporary context, Bettcher asked, "Can my book make any difference, I wonder? And, if so, what would that difference be?" shortly after its release, in the *Blog of the APA*.[1] It is apparent from the following commentaries that both *Beyond Personhood* and Bettcher's ongoing, caring engagement in trans sociality have undeniably made—and will continue to make—a positive and lasting difference.

In "Trans Space is the Place," Amy Marvin and Isobel Bess explore the affinity between taking space seriously and understanding philosophy as ground-bound. Bettcher defines ground-bound philosophy as philosophy that is both responsive to oppression and takes as its starting point "the perplexity [experienced by those oppressed in a world] that arises when the common sense of a world makes no sense at all"—i.e., the existential WTF.[2] Marvin and Bess find that there is a lack of "textured detail" when it comes to spatial relationships between and within the dominant overworld and resistant underworlds as Bettcher presents them (see the summary below of "*Beyond Personhood* Beyond Sexuality" by Ray Briggs for a brief explanation of these worlds). They argue that if trans philosophy is to truly be a ground-bound practice, the ground on which it occurs is spatial; we must consider—with much greater specificity—how trans philosophy is done *in spaces* shaped by navigating the existential WTF together with others, across time.

In "Making Meaning from the Ground Up in *Beyond Personhood*," Javier Pitts Guzmán highlights a tension between Bettcher's characterization of interpersonal spatiality and her explicit appeal to María Lugones's ontological pluralism. Ontological pluralism commits us to "an ontology of the social that squares with everybody's experience of the social," and Bettcher suggests this "best captures the truth of trans and nonbinary misgendering," as "there's a multiplicity found in the tension between [the overworld] and trans underworlds."[3] Interpersonal spatiality is "the characteristic of admitting of closeness and distance,"[4] and while the boundary system in a particular cultural location is contingent, there being some boundary system at all is transcendentally required. Lugones, however, is explicitly critical of putting things into transcendental terms. This tension, if unresolved, threatens to undermine the ground-bound nature of Bettcher's account. Pitts Guzmán ultimately suggests a way out of this tension may be understanding interpersonal spatiality in a way that's still true to Lugones (and Anzaldúa) as instead emerging from "meaning-making in the cracks of worlds."

In "*Beyond Personhood* Beyond Sexuality," Ray Briggs explores the implications of Bettcher's characterization—which builds on the work of María Lugones—of intimacy in the "overworld" and "underworlds," for lesbian and gay underworlds in particular. The "overworld" is "a dominant system of concepts, practices, and social scripts that shapes who we are, what meanings we can express, and which actions are open to us," while "underworlds" are "alternative systems that let us access different identities, meanings, and actions." One key feature of the overworld is the heterorelational complex, which polices intimacy by upholding that men and women occupy complementary sex roles. Bettcher's work offers a novel explanation of the harms that the overworld and this complex visit upon trans people (especially trans women). Briggs builds upon this by comparing sex-representational systems across worlds, revealing how there are sites of resistance to the heterorelational complex in lesbian and gay culture, yet "disturbingly large swathes of it can survive the translation of intimacy from straight settings to queer ones."

In "Comments on Talia Mae Bettcher's *Beyond Personhood*," Tamsin Kimoto motivates three distinct lines of inquiry that offer opportunities for both expansion and complication of Bettcher's work. In their first line of inquiry, Kimoto expresses a curiosity about both the tensions and insights that we may gain regarding gender phorias from Bettcher's opening positionality statement about the perspective from which the book emerges. The second line of inquiry encourages considering the inhuman alongside dehumanization and the non-human animal. Kimoto explains, "the inhuman attempts to identify the ways in which that which might be human gets marked as mere resource for extraction," akin to a nonpersonal object for

Bettcher.[5] While this complicates Bettcher's reading of race, it also invites us to explore what "thinking from the standpoint of an object evacuated of humanity allows us to recognize both about the nature of anti-trans violence and oppression as well as the kinds of remaking of the human that trans theories already undertake." The third line of inquiry invites further expansion on theorizing trans sexuality and what else it might offer an account of interpersonal spatiality. This is prompted by Bettcher's book primarily (and understandably) attending to trans sexuality as a "domain of threat and violation."

The issue concludes with Talia Mae Bettcher's response to the commentaries, opening with how, despite its theoretical density, *Beyond Personhood* is a "gesture of intimacy in its own right," given the vulnerability of laying out her theory bare. With this gesture, she has invited readers to get up to some good trouble by joining or continuing the conversations of which this work is a part. She takes up each challenge and invitation from the commenters in earnest, occasionally offering multiple interpretations. Bettcher herself carries these conversations forward by highlighting work in development, questions to be taken up, and opportunities for future collaboration.

We are deeply appreciative of the care and understanding that Ami Harbin, Barrett Emerick, and Jordan Pascoe have modeled through their mentorship as we transitioned into our editorial roles. We also thank Imogen Sullivan for her support in the early development of this issue.

NOTES

1. Talia Mae Bettcher, "Beyond Personhood: An Essay in Trans Philosophy," *Blog of the APA*, July 9, 2025, https://blog.apaonline.org/2025/07/09/beyond-personhood-an-essay-in-trans-an-invitation-an-invitation/.
2. Talia Mae Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood: An Essay in Trans Philosophy* (University of Minnesota Press, 2025), 259.
3. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 63.
4. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 260.
5. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 262.

ABOUT *APA STUDIES ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY*

APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy is sponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of Women and Gender. The newsletter is designed to provide an introduction to recent philosophical work that addresses issues of gender. None of the varied philosophical views presented by authors of *APA Studies* articles necessarily reflect the views of any or all of the members of the Committee on the Status of Women and Gender, including the editor(s) of the newsletter, nor does the committee advocate any particular type of feminist philosophy. We advocate only that serious philosophical attention be given to issues of gender and that claims of gender bias in philosophy receive full and fair consideration.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

1. Purpose: The purpose of *APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy* is to publish information about the status of women in philosophy and to make the resources of feminist philosophy more widely available. *APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy* contains discussions of recent developments in feminist philosophy and related work in other disciplines, suggestions for eliminating gender bias in the traditional philosophy curriculum, and reflections on feminist pedagogy. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on the Status of Women and Gender. Articles submitted to the newsletter should be around ten double-spaced pages and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language. Please submit essays electronically to the editor. All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. References should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

2. Where to Send Submissions: Please send submissions and inquiries to the editors: Lav McKittrick-Sweitzer (they/them) at lmckittricksweit@butler.edu and Desiree Valentine at desiree.valentine@marquette.edu.

3. Submission Deadlines: Submissions for spring issues are due by the preceding November 1; submissions for fall issues are due by the preceding February 1.

ARTICLES

Trans Space Is the Place

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OTHER SPACES

INTRODUCING SPATIALITY

We have written this book review from several different spaces. Originally, we thought about our relationship with Talia Bettcher's new book *Beyond Personhood: An Essay in Trans Philosophy* from our apartment in Bethlehem, PA when asked to conduct a revision for a different essay. We did encounter other trans people while living there but mostly in a fleeting way, with much of our trans-related artistic and academic practices happening in cis-dominated spaces. After Amy shared a draft of this essay at a mostly-cis-kinda-trans space in a conference room at the Baltimore APA, we continued working on it in Syracuse, NY, between occasional trans potluck nights. Finally, and somewhat rushed, we tried to finalize the essay in the cis-dominated suburbs of Philly, where we were pleasantly interrupted by a trans woman who stopped by to chat about Linux distros and medieval cloaks. This was the place where Amy waged a childhood war to access transition, but later became a place we visit to help out her aging parents. Soon we ventured to New York City, which advertises itself as a special hub of

culture and safety for trans people who can afford housing in ever-shifting districts. All of this writing has taken place in the northeast of the United States of America during a time of rampant austerity, open corruption, governance by disaster oligarchy, crimes against humanity, and moral collapse. Our practice of writing about *Beyond Personhood* was consequently one that shifted through various spaces over time, shaped by cisness and transness in different ways, just as we were.

It is in these contexts that we encounter Bettcher's ground-bound philosophy, and we are interested in the relationship between her book and space. First, we reconstruct Bettcher's argument with a focus on her understanding of philosophy as a relational and interpersonal practice, bringing together her concepts of ground-bound philosophy, interpersonal objects, reality enforcement, realization, and worlds. We then attempt to locate space within her framework, finding that her approach does not provide textured detail about the relationships between cis space and trans spaces, or the relationships between trans spaces and other trans spaces. We conclude by reading space back in Bettcher's account of ground-bound philosophy, thinking about the complicated construction of trans philosophy over time and place.

THE INTERPERSONAL SPATIALITY OF TRANS PHILOSOPHY

At the conclusion of Talia Bettcher's *Beyond Personhood* she asserts that her work "provides a trans basis for trans theory for perhaps the first time."[1] She sets the stakes for this approach early in the book, calling her essay "a resistant sense-making exercise in the face of trans oppression."[2] Trans philosophy is engaged in the project of "making sense" in a dominant world that deploys its skewed "common sense" to cast trans lives as on some level deluded or doomed.[3] This common sense fails to totalize or even clarify trans experience, with trans philosophy emerging from a deeper engagement with an "existential WTF" that results from dominant reality repeatedly failing to answer the riddles of trans existence. The "existential WTF" emerges on the ground from experiences with oppression, and the resulting interrogation develops into a kind of "ground-bound" philosophy.[4] This ground-bound character of trans philosophy is crucial to Bettcher's framework. She asserts, "To the extent that philosophy remains a vibrant force in the world, it must be one that is a ground-bound practice. I say this out of necessity not only of resisting oppression but also of discovering deep truth."[5] Whereas much of the discipline of philosophy has taken ground-bound philosophy to be inherently biased in a way that never stuck to the Platos and Russells and Rawlses, Bettcher emphasizes that ground-bound philosophy is the main way that we should proceed as philosophers for the sake of better morality, politics, and inquiry.

Ground-bound philosophy, a necessary condition of trans philosophy, is contrasted with a table-gazing model of philosophy. The table-gazing model prioritizes a "self" or "subject" that is aware of itself being aware of objects outside itself, and prioritizes this kind of awareness over others.[6] This table-gazing model becomes abusive when denying the status of interpersonal objects: they are to be looked at and thought through by the observer-subject rather than considered interpersonally. If we consider the preface to *Trouble with Gender* by Alex Byrne, for example, he reassures the reader that his analysis of gender as a confused category (or at least confusing to him) is "not concerned with inflammatory social and political issues," choosing to conduct a distanced systematic philosophical engagement with trans people as a set of objects he can evaluate from afar.[7] Kevin Richardson argues, in contrast to Byrne's framing, that he is involved in a deeply political project that aims to globally introduce, spread, and consolidate anti-trans policies.[8] In the words of Zohran Mamdani, "For too long, those fluent in the good grammar of civility have deployed decorum to mask agendas of cruelty."[9] Bettcher writes,

> It's a dysfunctional relational state oddly touted in the table-gazing model as a paradigm instance of intersubjectivity. It is the appropriate mode to adopt when one wants to be polite, nice, distant, unengaged. It is a very thin form of interaction that has any possibilities of intimacy gutted. . . . What the table-gazing model doesn't capture is the depth of full relationality and the ways it can be absent.[10]

The table-gazing model, emerging through colonial modernity, risks totalization as the true disciplinary approach of philosophy. She continues,

> The table-gazing model is, of course, foundational to these ways of knowing, and it endorses full unfettered access to everything. Nothing is subject to boundaries. All must be stripped bare. In what ways is philosophy like that? To what degree does it confuse solitary investigation with dialogue and nonpersonal objects with interpersonal ones?[11]

Although Bettcher does not directly discuss arrogance here, her work is heavily influenced by the work of María Lugones, and we can helpfully relate her analysis with Lugones's famous extension of Marilyn Frye's arrogant eye. The table-gazing model arrogates the targets of a gaze, grafting their substance to the viewer without asking, while simultaneously distancing itself from its target.[12] To choose trans philosophy over the table-gazing model is to refuse arrogance and turn towards deeper relationality through philosophical inquiry. In conversation with Bettcher's earlier work, Hil Malatino points out many of the ways that trans bodies complicate philosophy through our intermeshed relationship with the world, troubling concepts such as intimacy, gender, autonomy, selfhood, agency, and naturalness.[13] We get beyond the use of our bodies "as a prompt for cis folks" when we extend these complications towards developing an ethos of care.[14] In this understanding, philosophy is as much about proximity, distance, and relationality as it is about premises and conclusions.

It makes sense in this context of ground-bound and table-gazing philosophy that Bettcher rethinks relationality and intimacy. Philosophers have become bewitched by

the Western concept of the self and the subject and the person into thinking that we are distinct from objects, but Bettcher holds this is not so. At a basic level, we are aware of ourselves not as primordial table-gazers but instead as objects for others. We are specifically a kind of interpersonal object, in that our objecthood relates to the negotiation of boundaries, and we are frequently active objects that engage in self-display with other objects.[15] Consequently, central to trans philosophy is the matter of interpersonal spatiality, the negotiation of "closeness and distance" among interpersonal objects.[16] This relates to the ethics of boundaries and intimacy, as well as capacities for the realization of identity in relation to other objects. Fused with ground-bound philosophy's affinity for ontological pluralism, we can consider how the meaning of our interpersonal objecthood—negotiated in relation to moral sex—varies between dominant spaces and more accepting subcultures.[17]

In contrast to Bettcher's emphasis on ontological pluralism, the dominant world that we currently live in imposes a narrow view of what reality must consist of in relation to sex. Reality enforcement is a process through which the meaning of our lives must be based on assigned sex at birth, grounded in a destiny derived from genital configurations that must follow one of two pathways. These pathways are also moralized, shaping how our bodies are interpersonally encountered by others. When someone departs from the expectations of the sex-representational system, their lives are cast as make believe, deception, mere appearance, or pretending, facing condescension or punishment according to how much they challenge the one true meaning that sex should confer.[18]

Though the dominant sex-representational system claims to be the only reality of sex and attempts to enforce itself as such, Bettcher reads ontological pluralism into the many ways that trans lives and community practices create a multiplicity of meanings beyond its grasp. She calls the world of the dominant sex-representation system an overworld, consisting of how most people are expected to tether the life of sex to two static, unchangeable, and non-negotiable origins. In contrast, she points to the existence of underworlds such as trans subcultures that present many possible ways to interpersonally navigate the social meaning of our sexed lives. Such underworlds provide a plurality of ways that sex can be achieved through self-recognition rather than external systematization, as well as different practices of conferring sex in the context of interpersonal spatiality.[19]

While reality enforcement involves a process of marking all bodies for all time according to an origin of assigned sex at birth and a twofold fate that must be followed based on this, Bettcher points to realization as a contrasting practice of becoming real in relation to others. Realization involves self-recognition and playing with the liminality of sexed appearance, which can be carried forward to the practices of interpersonal spatiality found in collective underworlds.[20] In a particularly fantastic passage, Bettcher explains,

> Far from deluded, I say, self-recognition is a profoundly perceptive apprehension. What is grasped, in part, is that the intimate significance of a proper appearance is not inevitable. It is, rather, entirely socially contingent. We grasp the possibility that the make-believe needn't be make-believe. We grasp the possibility of social transformation. We grasp the fragile state of this (un)reality. And we understand that whether this moment ends, is relegated to mere pretense, depends only on how we are received, how we are recognized, and that this is a contingent matter of the social.[21]

While overworlds attempt to fully determine us as sexed objects, it is possible to renegotiate these terms through underworlds that permit alternative and more expansive systems of meaning.

Ground-bound philosophy emerges from an underground, emphasizing the unfettered WTF of existence in its many possibilities beyond preset expectations. As a pivotal work of trans philosophy understood as a ground-bound practice, Bettcher's essay itself can be understood as a voice from the underground. Her book is not just a "when tables speak,"[22] but also a Persephonic offer to take philosophy and theory in new directions, engaged more deeply with each other every step of the way.

THE SPACE OF SPATIALITY

There is more to think about through Bettcher's account in relation to interpersonal spatiality, including overworlds, underworlds, and space itself. Bettcher rejects focusing on categories such as "cis" and "trans,"[23] but there are reasons to highlight these oppositions as they structure relationships between overworlds and underworlds. Categories such as "cis" may well be imperfect and hastily wielded, but they can also illuminate the ways that knowledge, institutions, language, histories, and spaces are constructed in opposition to trans life.[24]

Bettcher defends her choice to avoid framing transness in opposition to cisness by arguing that trans people are not mainly oppressed due to placement within the category "trans." For example, she writes,

> To put it crudely, it doesn't usually go down like this: "Hey, look, a transgender person! Let's go harass them!" It typically goes down like this: "Hey, look, a man in a dress! Let's go harass him!"[25]

It is important to not frame everything in terms of an unspecified transness. Mirha-Soleil Ross, for example, compellingly argued that overly general understandings of transphobia risk obscuring that violence against trans people has historically been violence against transfeminine sex workers.[26] It may also be true that transness was not so much the focus of oppression against us in the past compared to broader mechanisms of reality enforcement. Growing up in the 1990s, our introduction to transness was often an introduction to the ways that our lives would always be reducible to "really a man," as found in the films *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* and *Austin Powers*; or in the show *Jerry Springer*; or as repeated in the words of friends and family who enjoyed such media.

Even so, there is something more specific about the usage of "tranny" that indicates non-trans people beginning to consider us as a distinct type of person in opposition to their singularly proper way of life. A button held at the Toronto ArQuives made by Xanthra Phillippa MacKay and Mirha-Soleil Ross from around 1990 responds to its escalating use, reading "DON'T CALL ME TRANNIE SHITFACE."[27] Thinking of us as "trannies" also offered new ways of engaging with our lives, including serving as a unique type of person for sex. In the case of the trannie chaser, typically defined as someone who reductively seeks out trans people (usually trans women) for sex, we became not just "a man in a dress" but also "the best of both worlds."

Even if oppression did not organize directly against transness in the past, this does not mean that it will not do so in the present or future. We have been facing escalating opposition to "trans" since around 2018, ranging from US President Donald Trump's repeated complaints about "transgender for everybody"[28] to a headline from the UK's *Telegraph* declaring "This Must Be the Year Britain Finally Kills off Trans Ideology."[29] Drawing from Bettcher's framework, we could argue that this call to kill off trans ideology is an attempt by a dominant ontological system to shut off a more pluralistic approach to sex. The underworld has threatened the overworld. Reality has been challenged and now it must be reinforced. However, this misses the use of "ideology" as a polite decision to not spell out the relationship between trans ideology and trans life. "Trans ideology" is not a clear distinction from but instead a metonym for trans people, since we are taken to emanate such ideology through our mere presence and requests for autonomy and respect within cis spaces. Trans ideology and trans activism simply mean trans people with an added sneer, no matter what bullshit cis people spew about these distinctions.[30] It is for this reason that every trans person morphs into a "trans activist" in the hands of cis news media, since we are not distinguished from the perceived moves that we make to alter the proprieties of dominant society. At this point it is not a matter of disputing that many cis people want to restrict and eliminate *us* (rather than just our *ideology*), but instead a question of to what extent they are willing to execute this desire. In recent years there has been an escalating project to secure public and private spaces as cis, pushing trans people out or punishing us for remaining. This is not entirely a matter of ontological pluralism as interpersonal spatiality, but also of the spaces we find ourselves in: schools, bathrooms, nations, fields, states, street corners, prisons, airports, conferences, and anywhere we are forced to use identification documents.

In Bettcher's work, the spatiality of the dominant overworld is given several characterizations: a system of ontology and meaning;[31] a social fabric;[32] a network;[33] a context;[34] a folk system and social order;[35] a social reality;[36] a colonial gender/sex system imposed by white Europeans;[37] and part of a colonial capitalist system,[38] but this leaves much more to say about spaces and places in their many textures. Additionally, Bettcher only brings up "actual space" briefly in the sense of land.[39] Interpersonal spatiality is a concept through which "We move in space,"[40] but a portrait of such spaces is left largely undefined. Trans sex workers live precariously due to economic and institutional factors[41]—but the economic and institutional factors of where? Reality enforcement is described as "institutionalized"[42] but through the institutions of which place? In the sections on colonization, we do get more causal specificity: whatever these spaces of the overworld are, they are deeply shaped by the European ruling class[43] for the purpose of empire-building[44] that secures a "colonial capitalist system."[45] However, discussing space at the level of colonial empires and resulting capitalist systems, while important, still remains a bit too general without further elaboration.

When thinking about underworlds, Bettcher suggests they are "resistant subcultures" and "alternative ontologies,"[46] perhaps modeled after the specific practices of trans subcultures in Los Angeles in the United States.[47] But which subcultures? Los Angeles has many different trans people, many different ways they are organized in relation to each other, and many different associated practices. For example, Amy lived in LA in 2010, but her experience with trans subcultures and alternative ontologies was likely quite different, and she did not cross paths with Bettcher. If only! Elsewhere, underworlds seem to mean "countercultural practices" and related ontologies,[48] "different social fabrics of interconnected social and discursive contexts,"[49] resistant communities,[50] a friendly rather than hostile context,[51] or "new interpersonal spaces" with "as yet unfathomed creative possibilities."[52] It does seem like we are discussing specific spaces, but they remain unexplained in detail.[53]

One reason why we should consider spaces in a more specific way is because this can help us better understand their intricate dynamisms, histories, constitutions, and weaknesses. Relationality is central to a Bettcherian ground-bound philosophy, so it seems like collective constructions of spaces should be as well. For Perry Zurn in *How We Make Each Other*, worlds are made and destroyed through collective action, generating not only a sense of kinship but also changes to what kind of place an institution can become.[54] The spaces of the Five Colleges (as of this writing becoming Four Colleges) that he focuses on also run into limits of reworlding, tensions in policy, failures of intersectionality and coalition, and differences in tactics.[55] Additionally, Eden Kinkaid emphasizes that the presence of trans people frequently leads to a disorientation of cis spaces, indicating they are not so stable as they are often taken to be.[56] Focusing on trans spaces would consequently involve a more textured account of the ways that we build, navigate, disorient, and disrupt specific spaces.

While spatial metaphors can be useful for thinking with, they risk obscuring the real spaces in which we live our lives and the social processes by which those spaces are produced, contested, and transformed. We are trans in space, which is to say we're trans at home, we're trans on the bus, we're trans in the woods, and we're trans at the museum. In each of these and countless other spaces, being trans means something different. In a bathroom or on a sports field, our mere presence might be seen as a contestation that risks disrupting the foundational norms by which a given space is constituted. At a trans poetry reading, we might be briefly unremarkable, another trans woman in the crowd. Waiting for a cheeseburger at the

Olive Hill, Kentucky Dairy Queen, we might find ourselves given the stink eye by some rough ol' boys with violent intent. These contexts are not the products of a general system of interpersonal distance but of particular histories, materialities, and practices.

In the United States, we live under a fascist regime that actively seeks to eradicate visible trans life from public space. This battle is currently playing out unevenly across many fields, but it is clear where it ends. The prison and the concentration camp are also spaces where we are trans. We must think not only about how to navigate these spaces but how to contest them, disrupt them, abolish them, transform them. We must think about how to produce spaces of our own within and against a dominant society, a cis society, that opposes our continued existence. In order to do this, in order to even think about it, we have to be able to theorize space as it is lived and produced beyond the realm of metaphor and philosophical abstraction.

Considering the complexities of spaces would also complicate the relationship between underworlds and overworlds. Bettcher emphasizes that she does not wish to blur her concepts of overworlds and underworlds.[57] We are not so certain about this separation. Are overworlds not, through their dominant status and totalizing ambitions, at least partly constitutive of underworlds? Even now, we write this essay within a broader logic of the academy that may be characteristic of underworlds (trans, feminist), but also can in no way be fully separated from an overworld. When we do this work, are we in an overworld, an underworld, an overlap between the two, or are these demarcations not always determinant? Turning to underworlds, are they not capable of causing disruptions, however little they might be, within the overworld? Judith Butler famously emphasized that the coercive repetition of "natural" gender also produces its very instabilities and possibilities for becoming otherwise.[58] How stable is Bettcher's overworld? Does our collective writing in this space of philosophy not offer some little glimmer of possibility beyond the sad agentless account of sex that cis people seem to largely prefer? There is so much more to explore here if we think about the complexities of space.

Finally, underworlds are framed as resistant, but how might we think about differences between them? Bettcher adds the caveat that she thought about underworlds by considering specific trans communities in LA,[59] which seems to point towards a plurality of underworlds within her account. Trans spaces may offer resistance against dominant cis spaces, but it is unclear that they proceed with this resistance in the same ways. This gets especially complicated when thinking about trans spaces that are reactionary or ambiguously edgy. Are the trans connections found on Elon Musk's *X* a kind of resistant underworld? What about /lgbt/ on *4chan*? What about the practice by some New York City-online crossover spaces of kinda-sorta ironically taking up the typological categories of HSTS (heterosexual transsexual) and AGP (autogynephile)? We could respond that such places, though predominantly consisting of trans participants, are failing to be a resistant underworld in some key way. Or perhaps we could say that they participate in a mere regurgitation of overworld reality enforcement as a form of self- and other-harm. These are no doubt likely characteristics of such spaces. But what do we make of failure in this context? Is it always the case that failure to resist the overworld entails a failure to constitute an underworld? Or is it possible for underworlds to fail at resistance and still remain underworlds? Trans films such as Louise Weard's ongoing epic *Castration Movie* foreground these uncomfortable dynamics and perhaps contest clear demarcations between overworlds and underworlds since they are staged as bleeding into each other, often with painful, cringeworthy, and funny results.[60]

Unfortunately, while it moves us forward in many ways, it also seems that *Beyond Personhood* has situated us a bit too far beyond space. What would it mean to bring space back into the picture of trans relationality, meaning, and philosophy? In the conclusion we return to ground-bound philosophy to show what it might look like if more aligned with a sense of trans space.

CONCLUSION: GROUND-BOUND PHILOSOPHY AND SPACE

Let's populate ground-bound philosophy with spaces, places, and characters, set up more like a film than an argument. What are the spaces of this thing that some of us have called "trans philosophy," which finds itself in the subtitle of Bettcher's book? There are certainly ways that we can characterize trans philosophy as something like a method or a system of ontology and meaning. However, it also involves a kind of interpersonal spatiality that is situated in specific places. We have older generations meeting each other around LA, such as Bettcher and C. Jacob Hale. Loren Cannon is in LA too. Then we get beyond LA with Naomi Scheman and Miqqi Gilbert.[61] We have a conference put on by graduate students at University of Oregon (who were they again?). Then a conference series that sometimes gets associated with an ongoing organization of US trans philosophers, but this is partially an illusion of stability because specific people organize the conferences in specific places. The American University conference is distinct from the virtual UT Austin conference, which is distinct from the hybrid Goucher and Lafayette conferences, with different organizers, places, attendees, and talks that complicate the continuous narrative.

Meanwhile, there is a conference in Canada, a workshop in the UK, and several scholars working on trans philosophy in Japan and Australia. There are trans and travesti philosophers, theorists, and activists in South America, and many of them have been around longer than the US trans philosophers. There are trans writers on the internet who put out work that is just as good if not better than ours, but the lack of academic credentials means we can just dismiss them as interlocutors. There are zines to be found in all kinds of places.[62] Some of the philosophers move to other kinds of departments and are no longer housed directly in philosophy. Many of the trans people we've met have left or been pushed out of the academy, but they still exist and have ideas. Some people who don't even like the label of philosophy get roped into co-writing essays that are at least partially about it. Different departments and locations lead to different methodologies and interlocutors, challenging

the coherency of "trans philosophy" altogether. All of these interactions are shaped by broader geopolitical contexts, histories, institutions, and the everyday spaces where we live, breathe, and do our work. Trans philosophy doesn't really have any founders beyond the confused and scattered grounds that we find ourselves standing upon. This is, we think, the trans basis of trans theory.

If trans philosophy is a ground-bound practice, we suggest that this ground is spatial. We must consider not just our reckoning with the existential WTF, but also our navigation of the WTF that is being, working, and thinking with others. Bettcher has been an important figure in trans philosophy, not only because of her ideas and writing but also because she has given so much of herself towards care, mentorship, and commitments to community above and beyond what philosophy typically honors. In the words of Hil Malatino, Bettcher has consistently undertaken the "recurrent, habitual, and mundane practice of showing up" that both clears the ground and makes us not want to bury ourselves within it.[63] For Malatino, trans mutual care is distinctly grounded in the creation of spaces and places, and he likens it to collectively constructing a house: "building the new world in the shell of the old."[64] Perhaps trans philosophy has been one practice of this among many others.[65] Our organizers are (or at least should be) as important as our writers. Our practices of care and service are equal to our schools of thought. Our friends, lovers, co-conspirators, accomplices, rivals, and mutual online-only acquaintances are equal to our interdisciplinarity. Our institutional affiliations and titles are a mere trick of the light.

The spaces of ground-bound philosophy are deeply shaped by our ways of being with each other and the interpersonal work that we put in, including care, service, and friendship. This also includes the not-so-pleasant aspects of being with each other such as resentment, critique, bitter disagreement, conflict, and failure. These do not tend to appear in the pages of a philosophy book or a CV, but they are a part of interpersonal space. Don't get us wrong: these failures can also show up in our writing. Even in works of trans philosophy, trans people may fail to appear.[66] But navigating space is even more complicated than navigating the page. What are the different textures of the trans philosophy spaces we and others have made? How are they shaped, perhaps even in ways that we should avoid, by our attachment to the academy, the conditions placed on the funding we receive, and the academic presses where we send off our work? How do such philosophy spaces fuel our hopes and despairs as we persist through trans moments of visibility and annihilation? Considering philosophy in this way is not totally without precedence. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, wrote a kinda-sorta fictionalized account of publishing drama, post-war politics, and romance as it shaped philosophy in her 1954 novel, *The Mandarins*.[67] What historical, geographical, and interpersonal dramas has our writing and work been enmeshed within, situated as it is upon the ground? What if, like, trans philosophy is just the friends we made along the way? Even this cutesy phrasing creates its own tensions: How can we avoid that uncomfortable gray area between friends promoting friends and nepotism? How do we cultivate an interpersonal spatiality of making new friends and allowing new pathways, contentions, approaches, and methods to flourish?

We think there are many ways that this framework of trans philosophy could continue to shake up the philosophical world, what we consider it to be, and what it could become. Perhaps it should no longer even be philosophy, or at least philosophy understood as some special siloed discipline that holds itself with arrogance against other knowledge practices. What a disaster it's been, following their table-gazing patterns, that professional philosophers have somehow convinced polite (cis) society that they are the main authorities on doing ethics. We appreciate the many insights Bettcher has provided us over the years through her engagement with the existential WTF, and look forward to more conversations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Lav McKittrick-Sweitzer for helpful comments, suggestions, and a plan to bring Hil Malatino back to the party.

NOTES

1. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 253.
2. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 11.
3. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 12.
4. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 259.
5. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 255.
6. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 264.
7. Byrne, *Trouble with Gender*, vii; see also 4.
8. Richardson, *The End of Binaries*, 36.
9. Mamdani, "Inaugural Address."
10. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 250.
11. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 255.
12. Lugones, "Playfulness," 3-4; 19, endnote 1.
13. Malatino, *Trans Care*, 38–39.
14. Malatino, *Trans Care*, 40–43.
15. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 50.
16. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 260.
17. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 63.
18. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 18–21.
19. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 62–66.
20. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 164–67.
21. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 142.
22. Bettcher, "When Tables Speak."
23. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 265.
24. See, for example, Heaney, *Feminism Against Cisness*.
25. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 16.
26. Ross, "Interview with Mirha-Soleil Ross," 90–93.
27. MacKay and Ross, *DON'T CALL ME TRANNIE SHITFACE*.
28. METRO TV, "US Saudi Forum."
29. Moore, "This Must Be the Year."
30. See, for example, Byrne, *Trouble with Gender*, 5.
31. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 62, 66.
32. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 75.
33. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 117.
34. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 128.

35. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 134.

36. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 146.

37. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 178.

38. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 254–55.

39. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 197.

40. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 38.

41. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 28.

42. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 104.

43. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 246.

44. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 251.

45. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 254–55.

46. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 65.

47. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 67.

48. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 73.

49. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 75.

50. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 85.

51. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 128.

52. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 255.

53. Some of the page ranges found in this paragraph and the preceding one are discussed in our essay "Atmospheres of Conversion" since that is the initial essay where we considered what Bettcher means by spatiality. This has been significantly expanded upon here in a transformative way beyond that initial pass. See Amy Marvin and Isobel Bess, "Atmospheres of Conversion," *philoSOPHIA: A Journal of transContinental Feminism*, special issue on the atmospheric turn, co-edited by Lauren Guilmette and Ada S. Jaarsma, forthcoming 2026.

54. Zurn, *How We Make Each Other*, 214.

55. Zurn, *How We Make Each Other*, 216–23.

56. Kincaid, "Toward a Trans Theory of Space," 3–4.

57. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 171.

58. Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

59. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 67.

60. Weard, *Castration Movie Anthology I* and *II*.

61. See Zurn and Pitts, "Trans Philosophy."

62. For a particularly well-made recent zine, check out Ding and Starr, *Being Trans in Philosophy*.

63. Malatino, *Trans Care*, 72.

64. Malatino, *Trans Care*, 71.

65. See also Kimoto, "APA Member Interview: Tamsin Kimoto."

66. See Kimoto, "What Does (Not) Appear."

67. De Beauvoir, *The Mandarins*.

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Making Meaning from the Ground Up in Beyond Personhood

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It is truly an honor to comment on Talia Bettcher's work, an author who I consider a brilliant and kind friend in this profession. I have learned a lot from her over the years, and I have taught her work on multiple occasions. In fact, I recently taught Bettcher's new book to a group of graduate students, including master's and PhD students in a gender and sexuality studies course at my university. It was fantastic to hear the students' feedback and talk through their interpretative moves responding to Bettcher's very dense arguments in the book. More often than not, I found myself referring the students to its second chapter, "On Intimacy and Distance," where the author lays out the core thematics and concepts of interpersonal spatiality (and to the very helpful glossary of terms in the back of the book where she offers short definitions for the core concepts in the book).[1] Also, as I taught the book, I came to recognize how this book is nothing short of a masterclass on writing within the genres of academic philosophy. That is, it is a

quite technical read, operating with an unfolding logic and order that while theoretically abstract in some of its architecture, primarily seeks to track existential concerns within trans life. The book also dives into historical detail and argumentation in later chapters showing the breadth of the author as a scholar both of trans philosophy and early modern European philosophy, a field in which Dr. Bettcher is known outside of trans philosophy.

My comments here will pick up on themes related to Bettcher's engagement with the work of María Lugones and Lugones's conception of ontological pluralism, in particular. For those who know Bettcher's work, it will come as no surprise that the conceptual resources and methodological approaches in Lugones's writings play a significant role in this book. Bettcher's many published articles cite and engage directly with Lugones's work, often extending the Argentine feminist's work in interesting and provocative ways. For example, Bettcher's groundbreaking 2014 essay "Trapped in the Wrong Theory" begins with an epigraph from Lugones regarding the "hidden structures of meaning that countenance and constitute domination" and brings that account to bear on the experiences of trans people facing falsely dichotomized worlds of meaning and sense that reduce or obfuscate the dynamics of trans desire, self-understanding, and politics.[2] Moreover, Bettcher's 2022 interview states that around 2003 (right around when Lugones's *Pilgrimages* came out) she had the opportunity to spend time with María, including hearing each other's presentations and performances, sharing meals and conversations, and discussing, in Bettcher's words, "everything from transphobia to the intricacies of Lugones's work in women of color feminism."[3]

Bettcher's work appears deeply indebted (and explicitly so) to Lugones's conception of ontological pluralism, and indeed she prefaces much of her account of the value and ethical, aesthetic, and political valences of what she eventually calls "trans underworlds" in the book and "trans subcultures" elsewhere in her writings on Lugones's claims. Bettcher also relies on Lugones's claims regarding "a desideratum of oppression theory that the theory be liberatory[; that] if oppression theory is not liberatory, it is useless from the point of view of the oppressed person."[4] In this, Bettcher takes earnestly and carefully Lugones's view that "the very multiplicity of worlds is what makes resistance possible at all."[5]

Importantly, this metaphilosophical commitment or "desideratum of oppression theory," as Lugones calls it, is a core facet of Bettcher's "ground-bound philosophy." That is, while the argumentation is indeed demandingly technical, precise, and, at times, overwhelming given the scope and implications of some of the book's conclusions, it is nonetheless diligently in the service of creating well-fought-for conceptual spaces for gender variant existence in all our multitudinal social, cultural, and historical complexity.

I also take the form and genre of the book as a performative element of this multiplicitous strategy. This is, in part, because I was lucky to read previous versions of the book and had the joy of being in dialogue with Bettcher during the last couple years of this project. In this sense, I know that the voice and genre of this published version does not encapsulate the other forms of voice and genre that previous versions included. Namely, as in other parts of her life, there was once a very performative series of elements to this book, a staging as it were, of a dialogue between the philosopher and her interlocutors. Instead, this book pivots through a series of highly complex neologisms, offering an organizational structure that demands repetition and rereading, and concludes with, in the author's own words, "a buried lede" that is as much of a deconstructive dissolution of conceptions of modern/colonial European subjectivity, as it is an argumentative checkmate for analytic philosophers who prefer language games in that genre instead. And while I concur with my dear comrade Tamsin Kimoto that ground-bound philosophy requires more than bridging the Analytic-Continental Divide, this book *does the damn thing*, and shows rather than tells us how to do that. In this, Bettcher creates a performative frame for doing philosophy, also in its many valences, which puts various genres of philosophy into dialogue, contestation, and question.

On this last point, however, this is where Bettcher's appeal to ontological pluralism comes into some potential tension with specific forms of argumentation in the book (and perhaps with the genres she employs in the book as well). Notably, many of the canonical works of systematic European, AngloCanadian, and AngloAmerican philosophy have aspired to universalizing pretensions. Bettcher is, of course, familiar with those aspirations from Descartes to Hegel, and with the presuppositions of political philosophers analyzing the liberal nation-state who contend with difference as a problem to be solved, rather than a strength or virtue. Given Bettcher's commitments to Lugones's work, which included multilingual registers of philosophizing, the tarrying with colonial paradigms of meaning that create liminal sites for connection and dissonance among oppressed peoples, and so on, Bettcher's work is explicitly committed to ontological pluralism. She prefaces much of her argumentation in the book on the centrality of ontological pluralism.

However, there are places in the book where I wonder how to negotiate this commitment to ontological pluralism with some of Bettcher's claims about interpersonal spatiality. For example, when introducing Interpersonal Space in Chapter 2, Bettcher writes the following:

> Interpersonal spatiality is the capacity of all sensory and discursive encounters between us to admit of closeness and distance. Another way to put it is to say that all our encounters occur in interpersonal space.[6]

Notice that she qualifies "all sensory and discursive encounters" between "us" as part of this account, and that "all our encounters" occur within the kind of ontological account she will detail in the book. There are a number of ways to read this statement. Perhaps the "us" and the "our" is qualified here as well—"we" are modern/colonial subjects of US academia, and thus she circumscribes the account in the book as something like an imminent

critique of modern/colonial conceptions of self-awareness, selfhood, and personhood. All of this would be consistent with ontological pluralism, as those who engage with this book, this genre, and this particular set of arguments likely have some investment in the self and its normative limits, contours, and violations. Importantly, for trans audiences of the book, our own political defenses of a sense of our own bodies, our desires for how we would like to exist and be understood in the world, and so on, are often tightly wrapped with a firm commitment to political agency regarding our own selfhood, personhood, and meaning-making capacities. Bettcher, for all her boldness and careful argumentation, knows that she is taking on those very presuppositions and revealing them through a logic of colonial violence and associated forms of modern/colonial normative and aesthetic practice (nakedness, objecthood/objectification, etc.).

The account we read in her book, despite its ground-bound and WTF origins, would nonetheless require that readers locate themselves in the "ours" and "us's" of interpersonal spatiality, itself perhaps a kind of *overworld* among other pluralistic worlds of spatiality.

Yet, the book does not appear to qualify interpersonal spatiality in this particular way. Instead, in a debate with social constructionist theorizing (and again, I want to preserve the possibility for authorial distance and performativity here between the "I" as the narrator of this book and the author herself, who likely has other genres through which to philosophize), Bettcher writes:

> it is worth emphasizing the respect in which I depart from social constructionist positions. While I recognize that there are different boundary systems in different cultural locations—specific boundary systems are contingent—I also recognize that the demand that there be some such system is transcendentally required in the sense that who we are—how we experience the world—requires some such system. In this way, violation and disregard become wrongs not merely of a particular system but of the very values of intimacy and distance themselves.[7]

Notably, this language of "transcendental requirements" does begin to run astray from Lugones's own expressed views (although perhaps Bettcher has some interpretative claims to add regarding what Lugones claimed she did and what Lugones actually does in her work; I am not sure on this).

Lugones does not qualify her claims, even those of ontological pluralism, on transcendental terms. Rather she critiques such transcendental appeals in others. She writes critically in response to Victor Turner's account of liminality and critiques that author's appeal to a transcendental self.[8] She states regarding the use of the concept of structure/anti-structure, "if we use [those concepts], then we do not have to appeal to the ahistorical, acultural, asexual, without race or gender, without a system of production within which her productive activity has meaning transcendental to ego in order to understand liberation from oppression."[9]

For Lugones, she rejects Turner's understanding of "meaning transcendental to ego." In this, meaning too cannot be transcendental to a given self, which appears as a strong claim regarding Lugones's own views about active subjectivity throughout the book. For example, she writes of active subjectivity that "it does not presuppose the individual subject and it does not presuppose collective intentionality of collectivities of the same. It is adumbrated to consciousness by a moving with people, but the difficulties as well as the concrete possibilities of such movings."[10] This view, when embedded within ontological pluralism, strives to retain a semblance of shifting meanings for active subjectivity—adumbrated by other movements of "desire, belief and sign" within the relations between worlds.

This adumbration—when refracted through its Latin roots refers to sketches, shadows, and, the root of the word umbrage, suggesting the shade of trees—offers us something different than transcendental meaning. Instead, interpersonal spatiality may emerge precisely through the shadow worlds of meaning cast across the modern/colonial gender system, its folk variants that reverberate in machista patriarchal worlds as much as in white nationalisms and gender-critical feminisms. This is a play on liminality and on meaning-making in the cracks of worlds.

Gloria Anzaldúa described this process in her dissertation chapter "Geographies of Selves" in a section titled "Las Nepantleras: Alternative Senses of Self" in the following way:

> Those of us who live skirting otros mundos, other groups, in this in-between state I call nepantla have a unique perspective. We notice the breaches in feminism, the rifts in Raza studies, the breaks in our disciplines, the splits in this country. These cracks show the flaws in our cultures, the faults in our pictures of reality. The perspective from the cracks gives us different ways of defining the self, of defining group identity.[11]

She continues, "Like green saplings, new viewpoints push up through the cracks and later grow into trees with roots, dislodging foundations of previous beliefs. Perspectives from cracks offer us different ways of defining the self, of deciding group identity."[12] When referring to critiques of mestizaje in this same passage, she writes that new constructions of identity are "new versions [that will] cast new shadows."[13] In this way, Anzaldúa and Lugones share in the shadow-play between worlds of meaning and sense, even for those that emerge anew and are offered up, like green saplings, striving for life in the world. Neither of these views appear to shift to a register of transcendental meaning-making, and thus function without ontological sure-footedness, but as no less of a ground-bound philosophy about the world. In this, my queries ask how the reader should situate the book and its account of interpersonal spatiality within the cracks and shadows between worlds, how and where might her approach grow? And in which worlds does it seek to cast shadows, not to cast us into darkness, but perhaps to offer us reprieve from the harsh rays of the enlightenment and its attendant concepts of selfhood, personhood, and subjectivity?

NOTES

1. I am grateful to the students of my fall 2025 grad seminar titled "Trans Affect and the Coloniality of Gender" for always pushing the complexity and contours of our discussions in the course.
2. Bettcher, "Trapped in the Wrong Theory," 383.
3. Bettcher, "How I Became a Trans Philosopher," 153–54.
4. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 55.
5. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 65.
6. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 38.
7. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 42.
8. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 60.
9. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 61.
10. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 6.
11. Anzaldúa, *Luz en lo oscuro*, 84.
12. Anzaldúa, *Luz en lo oscuro*, 84–85.
13. Anzaldúa, *Luz en lo oscuro*, 85.

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Beyond Personhood *Beyond Heterosexuality*

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[Content note: this paper uses transphobic quotes from writers and internet commenters to illustrate the assumptions underlying transphobia in queer spaces.]

1. INTRODUCTION

Transphobia is a complex phenomenon that admits of many sociological, anthropological, and philosophical explanations. *Beyond Personhood* adds to our collective understanding by providing a new explanation of transphobia—one that links it to the construction of intimacy in Eurocentric cultures, thereby illuminating mechanisms of oppression that frequently go overlooked.

Most of the work in *Beyond Personhood* goes toward describing and critiquing what Bettcher, following Lugones,[1] calls the "overworld"—a dominant system of concepts, practices, and social scripts that shapes who we are, what meanings we can express, and which actions are open to us. There are also "underworlds"—alternative systems that let us access different identities, meanings, and actions. Bettcher draws on trans-inclusive underworlds, centered on Los Angeles between 1994 and 2022. Since the overworld is heavily propped up by coercive state, military, and corporate power, it is an optimal site for her critique and analysis, which aims at explaining trans oppression and dysphoria.

The overworld that Bettcher describes is not only transphobic and racist, but also intensely heterosexist. Chapter 4 offers an account of the "sex-representational system"—a social structure that shapes the meaning of intimacy, maleness, femaleness, nakedness, sex, and romance. Bettcher's account focuses on the heterorelational complex, a version of the sex-representational system that constructs men and women as occupants of complementary sexual roles. She offers a novel account of the harms that the heterorelational complex inflicts on trans people, particularly trans women.

As I read Bettcher's account of intimacy, I found myself wondering how it might apply—or fail to apply—to the gay and lesbian underworlds where much of my intimate experience is grounded. On the one hand, gay and lesbian underworlds offer possibilities for resistance that are not present in the overworld. On the other hand, these underworlds have not eradicated transphobia or white supremacy, which suggests that liberating ourselves requires more than merely rejecting the heterosexuality of the heterorelational complex.

My hope is that by comparing and contrasting the sex-representational systems of different worlds, we can learn more about the modal features of trans oppression. For example, if some feature of the heterorelational complex is absent from the gay underworld, but misgendering is still a frequent occurrence there, then we can conclude that the presence or absence of misgendering doesn't depend solely on that feature. Conversely, if trans people enjoy possible modes of interaction in the lesbian underworld that are unavailable in the heterorelational complex, then we know more about when and how these modes of interaction are possible.

I will argue that while Bettcher's theory of intimacy in the overworld does not apply wholesale to lesbian and gay underworlds, disturbingly large swathes of it can survive the translation of intimacy from straight settings to queer ones. I identify some potential sites of resistance in lesbian and gay culture, as well as some surprising ways that the heterorelational complex persists there.

1.1. BETTCHER'S ACCOUNT OF THE SEX-REPRESENTATIONAL SYSTEM

The sex-representational system is part of the way that our society constructs intimacy—that is, the possibility of knowing and being known by one another, thereby becoming metaphorically "closer" to each other in "interpersonal space." Extending the spatial metaphor, Bettcher posits "pathways"—social scripts that tell us which sequences of gestures constitute an increase in intimacy. Every society needs some way of constructing intimacy, and therefore some pre-determined pathways or other, but the specifics are both contingent and culturally variable.

To experience any amount of intimacy with someone, we must first notice them; they must have an appearance. If we are not close—say, if we are strangers on the street or acquaintances at work—the expected appearance is *proper appearance*, which in Eurocentric cultures includes clothing. Intimate settings—particularly erotic ones—may call instead for *intimate appearance*.[2] In Eurocentric cultures, intimate appearance involves some degree of undress, and removing clothes signals an escalation of intimacy. The relationship between proper appearance and clothing is conventional and could be otherwise; Bettcher illustrates this by imagining a possible society that signals intimacy by putting on a special article of clothing.

As a matter of contingent fact, our society differentiates people by *moral sex*—their status as either men or women, which affects how we conceptualize both their bodies and their inner lives. Intimacy is structured differently for men versus women, and the structural differences are reflected by differences in intimate appearance. Male intimate appearance includes a penis, while female intimate appearance includes a vagina.[3]

The two types of intimate appearance are associated with different types of intimacy pathways; for instance, revealing a woman's nipples is considered a significant escalation of intimacy, while revealing a man's nipples is not. This creates an epistemic problem: if you can't assess someone's intimate appearance based on their proper appearance, but you want to become more intimate, how do you know which intimacy pathway to initiate?

Our culture solves this problem by using proper appearance to represent intimate appearance; a dress signals that a person has a vagina under their clothes, while a suit and tie signal that they have a penis. (If you think this sounds invasive, Bettcher would agree; society puts us in a double-bind by telling us that our genital status is something to withhold for privacy's sake, while also forcing us to disclose it via our clothes.) People assume that intimate appearance is "natural," while proper appearance is "artificial," but this isn't true any more than the appearance of a shaved dog counts as the "natural reality" underlying its usual fluffy appearance.

Within the heterorelational complex, female intimacy pathways are governed by the following mythology:[4]

1. The female naked body is imagined to be the source of male sexual desire.

2. Sexual desire is conceived of as something like a powerful force that, once set into motion, can hardly be stopped.

3. The female naked body is regarded as inherently subject to violation unless some mitigating cultural intervention occurs.

4. The preceding three are natural features of sexuality.

We might augment Bettcher's list with a few items about male intimacy pathways, in the same spirit.

5. Men are regarded as always desiring of and ready for sex.

6. The male naked body is regarded as inherently violating.

7. The preceding two are natural features of sexuality.

Assumptions 1–7 aren't true, and many people in the contemporary US would explicitly repudiate them, but they still shape everyday practice. Bettcher characterizes assumptions 1–4 as a form of "dialogical abuse,"[5] since they put women in a situation where they can expect continual boundary-crossing once they start down the pathway from proper appearance toward intimate appearance, regardless of whether they want their boundaries crossed. The assumptions also make women's inner lives appear shallow, since men can escalate intimacy by sharing their feelings and desires, while women's only way of escalating intimacy is allowing a partner sexual access.

Assumptions 5–7 are likewise abusive. Assumption 5 encourages men both to cross others' boundaries, and to accept disregard of their own boundaries without complaint, while assumption 6 makes it difficult—perhaps even unthinkable—for men to engage in intimate disclosure without violating others. Assumptions 5 and 6 also make it difficult to recognize when men are victims, rather than perpetrators, of sexual assault.

These myths of the heterorelational complex are closely related to (but not quite the same as) what Bettcher later describes as the *table-gazing model*,[6] which treats one's sensory access to a nonpersonal object, such as a table, as the basis for all forms of awareness. A table has no boundaries that must be respected: anyone can look at it, touch it, or access information about it at will. Within the heterorelational complex, female interpersonal objects have almost as little sexual agency as tables: they are there to be accessed by men. White women get a few more crumbs of agency than their women-of-color peers, since they are permitted to gatekeep male sexual desire, accepting or rejecting men's bids to escalate intimacy. But assumptions 1–7 make very little space for even the most privileged women to experience desire or to take positive, agential steps toward escalating intimacy themselves. (They also make very little space for men to be desired.)

In addition to being abusively sexist, Bettcher argues, the mythology of the heterorelational complex puts trans people—especially trans women—in an untenable position. The expected "natural" trajectory of erotic intimacy culminates in female nakedness, followed by heterosexual intercourse. But when a trans person begins down an intimacy pathway, their clothed proper appearance (for instance, the female proper appearance of a trans woman) is replaced with an intimate appearance that doesn't "match" (for instance, a trans woman's intimate appearance which is constructed as male).[7] Since proper appearance represents intimate appearance, the trans

person has misrepresented themselves according to the rules of heterorelational complex. And because there are entirely different scripts for the two sex-differentiated roles of the heterorelational complex, this misrepresentation has dire consequences.

For trans women, the result is a double-bind that exposes them to either ridicule and rejection or violent punishment. A man who perceives a trans woman as starting down an intimate pathway, either because she accepts him as an intimate partner or because he reads her public appearance as a signal of sexual availability, is likely to feel entitled to continue down that pathway. But when her proper appearance is replaced by an intimate appearance that doesn't match, he will find the expected intimacy pathway suddenly cut off. Reading the trans woman's proper appearance as an inaccurate representation of her intimate appearance, he will then interpret her either as a "make-believer" who is pretending to be a woman but fooling no one, or an "evil-deceiver" who has successfully "tricked" him into believing that she is a woman and deserves to be punished for this "deceit."[8]

This double-bind can be deadly for trans women, especially those who are otherwise at risk because of factors like race and poverty. Male sex partners may punish them for being trans with rape, battery, and murder. Even trans women who evade this outright violence suffer due to the double-bind. They may be treated as "dirty little secrets" because the pathways of the heterorelational complex don't permit a straight man to integrate a trans partner into his sexual and romantic life. They may face expulsion from intimate spaces like bathrooms and locker rooms, where they are assumed to be male underneath their clothes, and therefore already symbolically violating the cis women in those spaces, no matter how benign their actions are.

While Bettcher's discussion emphasizes harms to trans women, the heterorelational complex is also dangerous for trans men, who are sometimes violently assaulted for the "deception" of adopting a male proper appearance at odds with their female intimate appearance that "invites" violation per assumption 3. The murders of "Brandon Teena"[9] and Sam Nordquist[10] illustrate how deadly this violence can be. As with trans women, the harms are not limited to violent assault. While the assumption that trans men are female under their clothes prevents them from being seen as threatening, being seen as perpetually vulnerable is no guarantee of safety either. Recent bans on trans healthcare are rationalized by rhetoric that depicts trans men as vulnerable girls whose fertility is at risk. This rhetoric shows how the heterorelational complex is bound up with racism and ableism: the rhetoric implicitly presumes that trans men are white, tries to conscript them into propping up the institution of the white family by bearing children, and insinuates that they are unfit to make decisions for themselves because they are mentally ill.[11]

2. TRANS EXCLUSION IN LESBIAN AND GAY WORLDS

Lesbian and gay intimacy seem deeply at odds with the complementary male and female roles of the heterorelational complex. But unfortunately, gay and lesbian underworlds are not uniformly welcoming to trans people, and trans people who participate in those worlds may encounter transphobia. In this section, I will describe two forms trans exclusion can take in queer underworlds, one involving trans women in lesbian spaces, and another involving trans men in gay male spaces.[12]

2.1. TRANS WOMEN IN LESBIAN SPACES

Trans women have been a part of lesbian underworlds in the US since their inception. Negative attitudes toward trans women in lesbian communities can also be traced back at least as far as the 1970s. Janice Raymond's 1979 *The Transsexual Empire* is typically considered the foundational of trans-exclusionary radical feminist (TERF)[13] ideology, and its anti-trans ideas have influenced lesbian communities and beyond.

Being a lesbian in no way entails being a TERF: overall, lesbian cis women report less negative attitudes toward trans women than heterosexual cis women, and this remains true when comparing women with similar levels of feminist commitment.[14] Cristan Williams documents a long history of trans inclusion among lesbian radical feminists,[15] and a recent series of forty-nine in-depth interviews of lesbians by Baker A. Rogers revealed that not only did all respondents condemn TERF ideology, but the majority of them reported never having met a person who espoused it.[16] Nor is TERFdom the only form of transphobia: feminist-inflected transphobia now routinely cross-pollinates with conservative movements that are not even *nominally* feminist.[17] Still, several of the originators of TERF ideology considered themselves lesbian feminists, and the view remains influential with a small subpopulation of lesbians who consider themselves feminist or strongly feminist.[18] If transphobia is driven primarily by heteronormativity, it's surprising that such an ideology has any currency among lesbians, particularly those who are deeply committed to rejecting heteropatriarchy.

Yet TERF ideas are strikingly reminiscent of transphobia in the heterosexual world. Within the TERF worldview, we can identify the following mythologies:

8. Trans women are claimed not to be real women because of their "biology"; their claims to be women are viewed as make-believe or deception.[19]

9. Trans women are viewed as threats to cis women simply in virtue of existing. (Janice Raymond goes so far as to write, "All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves."[20])

10. It is seen as correct and fitting to exclude trans women from women's spaces.[21]

11. Trans women's sexuality and engagement in sexual acts is treated as suspect.[22]

2.2. TRANS MEN IN GAY MEN'S SPACES

Trans men are a long-standing part of gay men's communities. Lou Sullivan's diaries show that even in the

1970s and '80s, when doctors routinely denied treatment to trans men who failed to perform heterosexuality, it was possible for a trans man to participate in gay intimacy. Sullivan reports one casual sex partner who, on learning of his trans status and his lack of a penis, asks to confirm that he likes "getting screwed," then asks, "Well, then what's the problem?"[23]

In the intervening decades, trans men have made further inroads into gay culture. A 2019 study of trans men in Ontario, Canada found that while some trans men (particularly those who had not medically transitioned) avoided gay sexual fields for fear of rejection, others visited bars, bathhouses, and cruising apps with satisfactory results.[24] Participants who had been out for longer reported that trans men had accumulated increasing erotic capital over the preceding decade. One participant remarks: "Through porn, through political discussion, through a proliferation of images, cisgender men have started to notice that an FTM is a viable quantity. I'm speaking very capitalistic terms. An FTM is legitimately something you could fuck."[25]

The researchers note that "Interestingly, the fears that other trans men described in relation to accessing sexualized gay venues were largely unrealized among those who had taken the risk to visit them," though "This may be a matter of trans men correctly perceiving their erotic capital in such sites as it relates to gendered embodiment, and making decisions accordingly (i.e. those who are most likely to face rejection may be most likely to avoid such sites)."[26] Racialized, bigger-bodied, and feminine trans men reported more fear of rejection than their thin, white, masculine counterparts.

Records from Chicago's Leather Archives and Museum illustrate some common transphobic tropes in gay men's underworlds. I'll draw on the discussion surrounding Tyler McCormick, the first trans man to win the International Mr. Leather (IML) pageant in 2010. The comments under a brief 2010 article about McCormick's win, published on advocate.com, provide an illustrative cross-section of the transphobic ideas that were circulating at the time. In gay underworlds, as in lesbian underworlds, transphobia is not the consensus view; transphobic comments by some gay men are immediately challenged by others.[27]

Themes from the comments include the following mythological claims:

12. Being a Real Man is conceived as a matter of having a penis and testicles rather than a vagina. (Representative comment from "Rodney Moorcocke": "Tyler does not have a penis and balls and has never had them, so he's not a man . . . yet.")

13. Leather spaces are imagined as places where everyone is or should be sexually attractive to a presumed normative male spectator. (Representative comment from "Stephen Lane": "when i go to IML i used to know it would have thousands of hot leather men, sexy fucks, horny, hard dicks, etc. . . . like me. [. . .] as much as you all hate to believe this, IML should be a 'beauty contest' for Tom of Finland level entrants, the winner should make you drool, make you want to wear leather, make your dick, (if ya have one), hard.")

14. Vaginas are imagined to be repulsive, and repulsion by vaginas is seen as partly constitutive of gay masculinity. (Representative comment from "Ox": "If I wanted pussy, I'd be straight. Trannies feel they have the right to hit on me at parties clearly identified as Gay?")

The implicit acceptance of claim 14 is also illustrated by the online response to a recent workshop on vaginal play taught to an audience of gay men the Chicago Hellfire Club, by gay trans man and club member Kai Korpak.[28] The workshop went over well with participants, but received an incredibly hostile public reaction when an advertisement for it went viral. Internet commenters, many of them gay men, accused the presenter of being a straight woman and engaging conversion therapy, since supposedly, in the words of commenter "Peace-Automatic" on the Reddit forum "askgaybros," "NO gay man wants to engage in vaginal play. . . . And if they do, then they ARE NOT gay."[29] The stakes of this transphobic myth were real: people wrote Korpak threatening and harassing emails, and some of them tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to get him fired from his job.

3. EXPLAINING PATTERNS OF TRANSPHOBIA

What explains the transphobia that persists in gay and lesbian underworlds, and what does it tell us about the construction of intimacy?

Jillian Todd Weiss finds an explanation for gay and lesbian transphobia in the historic split between segments of the queer community that, until the 1950s, were typically lumped together.[30] From the 1950s to the 1970s, gays and lesbians gained visibility and a degree of legitimacy. Trans and bi became legible as distinct groups, and their ambiguity posed a threat to the perceived legitimacy of cis gays and lesbians. On the one hand, trans and bi people are "too queer," since they flout norms of masculinity and femininity in ways that go beyond choosing a sexual partner of the same gender, and therefore threaten the idea that queer people are "just like" their heterosexual peers. On the other hand, they are "not queer enough," since they sometimes "pass" as heterosexual, and therefore threaten the idea that homosexuals are easily distinguishable from heterosexuals.

All this suggests that aspects of the heterorelational complex persist even in queer underworlds. TERFs' focus on "biological sex" and the transphobic leathermen's focus on genitals immediately look like straightforward applications of Bettcher's concepts of *moral sex* and *moral genitals*.

The meaning of moral sex must be somewhat different in underworlds where partners cannot be divided into male and female roles. But while gay and lesbian underworlds present some challenges to the mythologies outlined in Bettcher's items 1–4 and my items 5–7, they do not

simply result in participants' rejecting the heterorelational complex wholesale. Instead, these underworlds exist in constant negotiation with the overworld. The overworld shapes the underworlds, which may incorporate parts of its mythologies even while challenging others.

While assumptions 1–7 are causally entwined, it will help to treat them as logically separable. This means clarifying assumptions 4 and 7, which cross-reference the others. What does assumption 4 amount to when assumption 2 is rejected as false (which would presumably entail rejecting 2 as unnatural)? I will interpret assumptions 4 and 7 as claiming that *whichever* features our mythologies attribute to male and female sexuality, these features are natural, and I will lump them together as "the naturalness assumptions."

3.1. LESBIAN CHALLENGES AND CAPITULATIONS TO THE HETERORELATIONAL COMPLEX

Lesbian underworlds create new possibilities for female sexual agency, allowing women to form identities as sexual agents rather than wholly passive table-like objects or mostly passive gatekeepers of male desire. In some ways, this challenges the picture of female intimacy pathways in the heterorelational complex, as captured by claims 1–7. For instance, sexual desire is typically *not* mythologized as a reason for a woman to coerce or assault others, which casts doubt on claim 2. While some lesbians do commit rape and domestic violence against their partners,[31] this kind of boundary violation is not typically constructed as a normal or natural part of lesbian sex. Insofar as lesbians view male sexual desire as contestable, this also casts doubt on claim 1; the female naked body cannot be the *sole* source of male sexual desire if part of the causal and moral responsibility for that desire lies with men.

While lesbian underworlds challenge the picture of *female* sexuality in claims 1–7, however, they do not necessarily challenge the corresponding picture of *male* sexuality. TERFdom arises from an ethos of lesbian separatism, which advocates keeping men out of women's communities on the grounds that men are dangerous.[32] Separatism is an understandable strategy for coping with an overwhelmingly misogynistic world—not only are lesbians vulnerable to misogynistic violence, but many are targeted specifically as *queer* women, using a range of violent tactics from battery that specifically targets masculine-appearing women, to social and economic pressure to partner with men, to "corrective" rape[33]—but it works largely by navigating around the dominant society's construction of masculinity, rather than by challenging it directly.

Lesbian separatism is wholly consistent with imagining that men are dangerous not for contingent cultural reasons, but because they differ naturally from women, in keeping with the naturalness assumptions 4 and 7. While some lesbian feminists have explicitly critiqued the claim that sexual difference is natural,[34] not all lesbian separatists internalized these critiques, and some strands of the movement remained attached to biological essentialism.[35]

The prevalence of naturalness assumptions would explain the TERF claim that trans women are not real women in virtue of their "biology," or moral genitals (claim 8). Furthermore, the mythology of female sexuality as inherently violable (claim 3) and male sexuality as inherently violating (claim 6), when combined with this naturalness assumption, would explain the TERF perception of trans women as threatening (claim 9), the desire to exclude them from women's spaces (claim 10), and suspicion of their sexuality (claim 11).

3.2. GAY MALE CHALLENGES AND CAPITULATIONS TO THE HETERORELATIONAL COMPLEX

Gay men's underworlds create new forms of intimacy for men, which allow them to be desired as well as desiring, and creates space for their intimate disclosure to be understood as a form of mutual sharing, rather than a way of violating others. This challenges the picture of male sexual pathways in assumptions 1–7. In gay male underworlds, the female naked body is not imagined to be the source—or even an object—of male sexual desire, which directly conflicts with claim 1. And in many venues, the male naked body is viewed as normal and desirable, which casts doubt on claim 6.

But other aspects of the heterorelational complex can easily go unchallenged by gay male underworlds. Gay life need not pose any deep challenge to the naturalness assumptions, when we read these as claims about the naturalness of sexual intimacy pathways *whatever they happen to be*. It is common in the US to believe that sexual orientation is inborn, unchangeable, and "joint-carving" in a way that makes it useful for grouping individuals and predicting other characteristics. Pointing out that gay sexuality differs from straight sexuality does not, by itself, challenge any naturalness assumptions about gay sexuality. These naturalness assumptions fit well with some gay men's endorsement of claim 12, which understands being a Real Man partly in terms of having the right genitals.

Claim 2 (which portrays sexual desire as a powerful force that's difficult to stop) and claim 5 (which portrays men as always wanting and ready for sex) are often in force in gay men's spaces, particularly venues like bathhouses and leather pageants where sexuality is at the fore. These assumptions would help explain gay leathermen's acceptance of claim 13, which treats sexual attractiveness as a requirement for participation.

In some ways, gay men's spaces challenge claim 3. Since women are not portrayed as sexually desirable in gay men's spaces, there is no incentive to begin or continue down an intimate pathway that involves crossing women's boundaries. But in the example of Tyler McCormick, the focus on his genitals does seem to be a kind of boundary-crossing motivated by misogyny. Some of the participants in the leather community seem to believe that such boundary-crossing is important as a way of excluding women, and perceived as feminine, from spaces that they see as masculine.[36] This aspect of misogyny seems to partly explain the fascination with vaginas and their supposed repulsiveness in claim 14.

4. CONCLUSION

Bettcher distinguishes between the dominant overworld and resistant underworlds to make an important philosophical point: trans liberation does not require us to rehabilitate concepts forged in the overworld and may require us to abandon them. But our underworlds are shaped by the overworld, with the massive heterorelational complex exerting a weird gravitational pull on our queer intimacies.

When building alternative realities, we must take care to explicitly challenge our overworld concepts, if we wish to make those realities truly inclusive of trans people and others who have been left out. The idea of natural sexual difference seems both particularly resilient, both in gay and lesbian transphobia, and in its appeal to right-wing transphobes.[37]

Beyond Personhood was written before the 2024 US election, when the situation for trans people took a sudden turn for the worse, both in the US and worldwide. This essay is not part of the project of describing the workings of fascism or the threat it poses. While that project is vitally important, I have no special expertise or novel insights that would connect it to Bettcher's book. Instead, I hope to contribute to another, complementary project that Bettcher builds toward: envisioning possibilities outside fascism, and outside the heterorelational complex. It is vitally important that the overworld not become the whole world.

NOTES

1. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*.

2. There is doubtless much to be said about non-erotic intimate settings, such as a parent nurturing an infant or a caregiver bathing a disabled adult. However, both Bettcher's chapter and my discussion focus on erotic intimacy.

3. This is not to say that someone's moral sex always corresponds to their actual genitals; for example, someone might count as a man despite having lost his penis due to a war injury. Moral genitals are the genitals that a person is supposedly entitled to, whether they have those genitals or not.

4. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 96.

5. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 98.

6. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 227–29.

7. What about trans people who have had bottom surgery? Bottom surgery may succeed in changing how someone's intimate appearance is read, but since moral genitals don't always match physical genitals, there is no guarantee. Someone who knows that a trans person has had bottom surgery, or who responds to other cues provided by their intimate appearance, may still perceive their proper appearance and their intimate appearance as mismatched.

8. See also Bettcher, "Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers."

9. I refer to this person by the name most commonly used for him in the press, though this was not among the variety of names he used for himself. D'Erasmo, "Boy Interrupted."

10. Montiel and Reidel, "Here Is What We Know."

11. Randall, "Irreversible Damage"; Hsu, "Irreducible Damage."

12. There are, of course, other trans people in gay and lesbian spaces beyond the scope of this essay. Lesbian spaces often include trans men, gay spaces often include trans women, and many queer trans people don't fit neatly into the "man" or "woman" categories.

13. For a helpful history of the acronym TERF, see Williams, "TERF: What It Means and Where It Came From."

14. Worthen, "This Is My TERF!"

15. Williams, "Radical Inclusion."

16. Rogers, "TERFs Aren't Feminists."

17. See Thurlow, "From TERF to Gender Critical."

18. Worthen, "This Is My TERF!"

19. Hines, "Sex Wars."

20. Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire*, 104. It is not clear whether or how this claim is meant to apply to trans men. The section of the book from which the quote is drawn takes aim at trans women in lesbian communities.

21. See Drucker, "Sandy Stone," and Trigilio, "Complicated and Messy Politics," for two famous historical examples of such exclusion.

22. Currans, "Transgender Women Belong Here."

23. Sullivan, *We Both Laughed in Pleasure*, 313.

24. Scheim et al., "Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Trans Men."

25. Scheim et al., "Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Trans Men," 574.

26. Scheim et al., "Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Trans Men," 582.

27. Supportive comments include the observation that McCormick is not the first trans man to compete in IML, a proud comment from the owner of the San Francisco gay sauna EROS noting that trans men are welcome there, multiple comments from trans leathermen detailing their community involvement, a sweet story from a cis gay man about befriending a trans man ("I harbored some negative opinions regarding Trans-Leathermen. Then I met a Trans-Leatherman who opened my mind, not to mention my bodily orfices. . . . That man went on to become a good friend, with whom I have done many things aside from sex"), and an injunction from one of the judges to "GET A GRIP, MARY! It's a frigging contest."

28. Kai Korpak, personal communication, November 22, 2025.

29. u/Peace-Automatic, comment on u/bladebag138, "'Uncharted Pleasures: A Gay Man's Guide to Vaginal Play' WTF?" Reddit, r/askgaybros, April 14, 2025, https://www.reddit.com/r/askgaybros/comments/1jz7cue/comment/mn6gfki/.

30. Weiss, "GL vs. BT."

31. Miller et al., "Domestic Violence in Lesbian Relationships."

32. Heyes, "Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory," 1099.

33. See Kilbride, "'This Is Why We Became Activists.'"

34. See, e.g., Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"; Wittig, "One Is Not Born a Woman."

35. Clarke, "Revisiting the Legacy."

36. For discussions of gay male misogyny and its application to cis men perceived as feminine, see Hale and Ojeda, "Acceptable Femininity?"

37. Thurlow, "From TERF to Gender Critical"; Mathers et al., "The Limits of Homonormativity."

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Comments on Talia Mae Bettcher's Beyond Personhood: *An Essay in Trans Philosophy*

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INTRODUCTION

If the central concepts at work in *Beyond Personhood* are things like *interpersonal spatiality* and *intimacy*, then it seems prudent to name the forms of intimacy Talia generates and sustains in the broader life of her professional work in philosophy. In her *What Is It Like to Be a Philosopher?* interview, Talia spends a great deal of time extolling the virtues of the many people who've shaped her to be the philosopher she is today. In addition to her decades-long friendship with Jacob Hale, she points to two figures in her development:

> In general, I have to say that women like Sandra Harding and Ann Garry inspire me: The grey-haired powerhouses of the profession. I have a hard time naming role-models, whenever someone asks. They're really the closest I can get. I mean, they did it in seventies when second wave feminism was just breaking. They had to be far more intelligent, better philosophers, than everybody else. By far. They had to be tough as nails. They had to absorb such crap, and still persist. They leave me in awe.[1]

Incidentally, this is an incredibly apt description of Talia and her presence and impact in philosophy. I, like many other trans philosophers, am fortunate to count Talia among my mentors and role models in the field. She's less gray-haired but no less a powerhouse and certainly a better philosopher than many; however, what has always stood out to me most about Talia is how she shows up for those of us who are following trails she's blazed in the field and for those forging their own. She's joined dissertation committees (sometimes at the eleventh hour), written letters of recommendation and promotion, sat on the phone with us, talked through ideas, emailed back and forth, strategized, borne our complaints and frustrations, and just generally been present. I know she's done so at the expense of being able to do her own work, but I also know that all of that is part of the work for her, and I don't know that we can yet really appreciate the enormity of what that work has enabled. These are ways of doing the work that often go unacknowledged in a discipline like philosophy and so I wanted to name them here.

It is precisely because of this more invisible labor that it is a delight to be thinking with Talia's work in this issue and with Talia herself in celebration of her book *Beyond Personhood: An Essay in Trans Philosophy*. Being asked to comment on her book feels like a full circle kind of moment that I wish could be purely celebratory. Instead, what I can say is that reading and thinking with *Beyond Personhood* while we are living through the intensification of systems of elimination aimed at trans people alongside many others

feels necessary. I'm appreciative of what the text opens up for consideration and the forms of inquiry it engages in the process of doing so. My comments here are broken into three lines of inquiry that, while interlinked, are, I hope, distinctive enough to offer different opportunities for conversation or engagement. My first set of comments is motivated by my interest in the specificity of Bettcher's positionality statement at the beginning of the text and how it shapes the kind of philosophical inquiry she undertakes. My second looks to the question of race and how the archive she draws upon both informs and potentially limits the scope of her engagement with the human-animal-object. And finally, I'm interested in how engaging sexuality more thoroughly might complicate the picture of the (trans) object throughout.

LINE OF INQUIRY ONE: THE GROUND

Talia Bettcher's *Beyond Personhood* opens with a set of claims addressed at the frequent (willful) misunderstandings of whom she writes for, noting that she's not interested in appealing to transphobes and instead writes for "trans people, nonbinary people, and new friends . . . to make new friends who are differently oppressed" and to build "new practices with new friends."[2] This insistence on the generation of new practices is key to understanding the text overall, and so I want to sit with how an emphasis on practice underscores the distinction between what Bettcher refers to as *ground-bound philosophy* and its table-gazing other. I take Bettcher's account to be in line with what Kristie Dotson has referred to as a necessary shift to a "culture of praxis" in the discipline as opposed to a culture of (mere) justification.[3] Whereas a culture of (mere) justification relies on an often-unstated but rigorously enforced set of rules to determine whether or not a particular work really is philosophical, a culture of praxis requires us to make situated judgments about the philosophical merits of a work based on how a given work actually works for "our living"; such a shift requires a "recognition and encouragement of multiple canons and multiple ways of understanding disciplinary validation."[4] Linda Martín Alcoff similarly tracks how even within philosophy, intramural bickering has severely limited the scope of the kinds of work that has been able to even get off the ground and how a kind of "bridge work" has been undertaken largely within the subfields of feminist philosophy and philosophy of race.[5]

As Bettcher notes in her discussion of ground-bound philosophy, this kind of work requires more than simply bridging the Analytic-Continental divide; indeed, it requires moving beyond the boundaries of philosophy and toward the multiple canons to which Dotson gestures. This is precisely because, as Charles Mills argues, standard philosophical practice tends to rely upon ideal theorizing in precisely the pernicious ways that maintain philosophical practice as a space that is constitutively unable to grapple with its own investments in a problematic status quo.[6] The correlative effect of this, however, for those of us who occupy the subject positions at stake in the kinds of work carried out by feminist philosophers or philosophers of race or disability is what Bill Lawson has referred to as a kind of "philosophical playa hatin'" in which minoritized philosophers are denied even the status *philosopher* before we've even been able to demonstrate our work.[7] We are already doing philosophy poorly simply by showing up in philosophy in the first place, and the fact that doing our work might (will) require going beyond the properly philosophical risks endangering that status further. Thus, Bettcher's insistence that this essay emerges from "several Los Angeles trans subcultures, between the years 1994 and 2022" and from the subject position of "a white, middle-class, more or less abled-bodied trans girl from Canada" is philosophically important and epistemically brave, and it leaves me craving further development.[8]

The positionality statement is a familiar genre for those of us working in fields like Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and they're also a feature of much of Bettcher's published work in trans philosophy. Despite this, I'm embarrassed to say that it had never occurred to me to think through precisely how where and when I transitioned might have impacted my sense of gender beyond our less granular distinctions (e.g., Global North/Global South) in the way Bettcher's statement invited me to. It seems to me to be a form of what María Lugones describes in her articulation of resistant subjectivity as expressing itself "infra-politically . . . Infra-politics marks the turn inward, in a politics of resistance, toward liberation. It shows the power of communities of the oppressed in constituting resistant meaning and each other against the constitution of meaning and social organization by power."[9] If infrapolitics moves our attention from the scene of the public to something that move beneath or alongside it, then it seems to move us into the gendered underworlds to which Bettcher attends in her discussion of ontological pluralism. Indeed, Los Angeles moves to the fore here as Bettcher notes that when she transitioned, she was "welcomed into Los Angeles subcultures that had existed for many years and that had long-standing practices that had never even shown up on the radar of mainstream culture" and she "learned from trans women of color" ways of being trans that encompassed being a "full and complete woman without surgical or even hormonal intervention."[10]

As another trans girl, coming from a different set of geographic, demographic, and generational markers, I'm curious to think through more of what's present in the text that is specifically Angeleno alongside the double Anglos Bettcher's positionality statement references. Specifically, I'm curious about the tensions such a positioning might engender as well as the insights it generates. As someone who lived in Los Angeles and deliberately didn't transition while there because the girls served too hard, I kept searching for the intimate markers of how an Angeleno might make sense of trans that differed from my own sense, which is in many ways indebted to the US South and to ways of gendering that are explicitly shaped by Blackness as much as they are by my own racial identifications. Indeed, what I now recognize about my sense that I wouldn't be cunty enough to transition in Los Angeles is that my immediate context (living on the westside and studying in a conservative, Christian philosophy department) was shaped by the kinds of racialized reality enforcements Bettcher details in the last part of the text. For example, some of the negative gender phoria I experienced there and continue to experience is due to pervasive fatphobia. Standards of beauty and desirability are of course geographically and

racially situated such that fatness circulates and marks gender differentially based on where one is and who circulates around you.[11] This is not to say that the South is any more a haven for (trans)gender messiness than anywhere else in the US, but it is to think about how gender phorias are shaped by geography in precisely the way the text invites. My curiosity here is shaped by my sense that following this line of inquiry pushes us beyond where table-gazing forms of philosophy are most comfortable.

SECOND LINE OF INQUIRY: THE BURIED LEDE

I'm deeply appreciative of the work being undertaken in the final section of the book, "The Buried Lede: The Liminalities among Us" and, in particular, for the locution of the *coloniality of intimacy*. Throughout these final three chapters, Bettcher reminds us of the enormity of what must be rethought, reworked, or revoked in order to theorize transness transly. In particular, I am grateful for the grappling with the question of race, of what it might mean to think gender and perhaps *trans*gender as themselves racial projects. I particularly enjoyed Bettcher's reworking of her earlier work on the morality of nakedness in light of an engagement with literature on colonization and clothing. It's an insight we often forget that the body about which we theorize is, more often than not, the clothed body and so engaging with the politics and moralities of fashion and fashioning an embodied self is incredibly fruitful. Fashion is of course central to many ways of transitioning insofar as we attend to the affects produced by wearing certain forms of clothing rather than others.[12] In a longer history of clothing, as Bettcher notes, the "meaning of those artifacts place on the body so that the artifacts *became* clothing, devices of concealment, when they had not already been" and the politics of this concealment is deeply gendered and racialized.[13] Clothing, as a tool of concealment and therefore the very thing that produces intimacy as it conceals it, is bound up with the colonial projects of European societies and signifies a kind of personhood and the possibility of its violation through the kinds of invading gazes that then come to mark the practices of white supremacy; visual displays of Black suffering and their consumption by white viewers have been central to both progressive and conservative race politics.[14] The scopic availability, as C. Riley Snorton puts it, of non-white bodies is possible through the imposition and denial of being clothed.[15]

So, clothing becomes one of the ways in which the human and its other(s) come to be delineated in coloniality/modernity. Clothing might be one of those things that signifies the line between the human and the animal that runs through the archives of transatlantic anti-Black and settler colonial discourses. As a ground for rethinking personhood itself, this makes quite a bit of sense to tarry with; however, given the turn to the object, and particularly Bettcher's interest in interpersonal and non-personal objects, I wonder if there isn't room to complicate the analysis by adding to the discourse of dehumanization and the non(?)-human animal a consideration of the inhuman. If dehumanization names ways of being pushed beneath the category of the human into the merely animal, then the inhuman attempts to identify the ways in which that which might be human gets marked as mere resource for extraction[16] or what Bettcher might refer to as a nonpersonal object.[17] If we look, for example, to the archives of yellow peril and orientalism, what we will find are myriad references to the Asian as machine or robot-like in their capacity for labor.[18] So, in addition to the categories of human and animal as considered within *Beyond Personhood*, there is also, fascinatingly, the machine—and the associations between trans women and machines are of course well-known to this audience.

My interest in probing this is twofold. First, while I think it's generous of Bettcher to allow for the possibility that Europeans were exaggerating or making primarily analogical claims in denying humanity to non-white, non-European others,[19] I have perhaps spent too long elbow-deep in the racial science archives to think this is the case. The recognition of non-Europeans' species membership does indeed appear to have been hard fought and bitterly contested. Second, as a way of thinking about how trans people are figured, I wonder what thinking from the standpoint of an object evacuated of humanity allows us to recognize both about the nature of anti-trans violence and oppression as well as the kinds of remaking of the human that trans theories already undertake. The synthetic and animal histories of the estrogen I inject into my left thigh every week point to forms of intimacy that might refuse the seeming obviousness of the distinction between the interpersonal and nonpersonal objects you describe. It seems obvious, for example, that trans people are often treated as nonpersonal objects, but we are hardly the first category to be subject to that treatment and, moreover, I wonder about the capacities, practices, and knowledges we have generated about how to be a nonpersonal, interpersonal object.

LINE OF INQUIRY THREE: OBJECTIFICATION AND THE OTHER BURIED LEDE

As a final line of inquiry, I am deeply interested in how sexuality is or isn't at work in the text. Given her focus on developing an analytic account of the structures of transphobia, much of Bettcher's discussion of interpersonal spatiality focuses on violations of intimacy. For example, under the politics of pretense, trans women might be relegated to being "dirty little secrets" by their cis male partners, thus restricting that eroticism to a "form of deviant sexual role-play in which the trans person is merely pretending to be female."[20] This is a kind of intimate violation insofar as it is in light of her trans status that the trans woman in question is barred from the larger field of the heterorelational complex Bettcher describes. If she has expressed a desire to be public about the relationship and her partner refuses to be public because she is trans, but nonetheless continues to insist on sexual access, then he would seem to be treating her as a nonpersonal object and engaging in a kind of boundary violation. Indeed, anecdotal experience teaches many trans women in this sort of situation that these are precisely the sort of men who might be dangerous to be involved with given the possibility of violence often present in these situations. If he is determined to keep her a secret, then publicity is experienced as a calamity of intimacy and therefore a threat to be managed.

I take it that this is the negative side of this particular aspect of trans life, and it is an aspect that many of us have to grapple with regularly. It's dangerous to pretend otherwise. At the same time, it is noteworthy that sexuality appears largely as a domain of threat and violation in the text; *Beyond Personhood* presents a (perhaps rightfully) pessimistic take on trans sexuality. I cannot help but wonder about what the other sides of trans sexuality might have to offer an account of interpersonal spatiality. Bettcher gestures toward these possibilities in her brief mention of *intimate recoding practices* in which trans people and their partners reconfigure boundaries and bodies.[21] While it's easy to frame these practices as a kind of temporary reprieve from an oppressive sexual regime, it strikes me that they are also akin to the kinds of underworld gender practices previously mentioned in the text. For example, another pathway to internalizing the understanding that one can be a "full and complete woman without surgical or even hormonal intervention" might be learning how to recode one's body through intimate sexual experiences.[22] That is, asking or being asked how to refer to a body in dirty talk gestures towards other modes of sense-making for how to articulate both one's body and the boundaries of access to it that can extend beyond just sexual intimacy. Given that sexuality is a domain of life in which it is difficult to deny that one is an object for others, it seems like closer attention to the variety of sexual experiences might enable a more thorough account of how objectification and experience of being an object for others works in relation to interpersonal spatiality.

NOTES

1. Cliff Sosis and Talia Mae Bettcher, "Talia Mae Bettcher," *What Is It Like to be a Philosopher*, May 2020, https://www.whatisitliketobeaphilosopher.com/talia-mae-bettcher.
2. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 10.
3. Dotson, "How Is This Paper Philosophy?"
4. Dotson, "How Is This Paper Philosophy?" 17.
5. Alcoff, "Philosophy's Civil Wars."
6. Mills, "Ideal Theory as Ideology."
7. Lawson, "Philosophical Playa Hatin'."
8. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 7.
9. Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," 746.
10. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 67.
11. Strings, *Fearing the Black Body*.
12. Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body."
13. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 182.
14. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection;* Wanzo, *The Suffering Will Not Be Televised*.
15. Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*.
16. Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*.
17. Cheng, "Ornamentalism."
18. Roh et al., *Techno-Orientalism*.
19. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 191.
20. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 106.
21. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 106.
22. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 67.

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"You Can't Have Everything . . . Where Would You Put It?":[1] *Responding to Tamsin, Javier, Ray, and Amy, and Isobel on* Beyond Personhood

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As Javier notes, this book was a lot more playful in its earlier instantiations. It interwove, with the theory, intimate sharings of my own life in Los Angeles over the decades. It included fun dialogues. It engaged in marked performative turns. It was creative AF. But, then, one day I decided to "shut it down, shut it *all* down." What remained—what I finally came up with—was a text that tittered between the merely dense and the outright impenetrable.

If any playfulness remains at all in the book, I suppose it's in its subversion of the old, "grand" European treatises. In some respects, the *Essay* reads as kindred to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. And it seems perversely appropriate to my attack on the foundational modern concepts of person, self, and

subject that the book plays with this genre. Not to explain my "jokes" but calling the book an "essay" is hardly an accident, of course.

Unlike these philosophers, however, I regard the work that theory accomplishes as multiple, worldly, and above all, dialogical. Theory can provide illumination in the WTF. Or, it can engage in warfare with hostile forces. Or, it can accomplish some other tactical aim. In this particular case, the theory was supposed to not just be *about* intimacy, it was supposed to *enact* a gesture of intimacy. Indeed, even though I wasn't sharing my story understood literally, it should be noted that the book has the form of a narrative—with a beginning, a middle, and an end. (There's even an initiating "event" at the end of Chapter Three.) Again, not to explain my playfulness. But, I guess, *to explain my playfulness*.

I don't know whether this was the right decision, ultimately. But I can tell you why I made it. First, my own life had taken some dark turns, and I just didn't feel all that playful anymore. So, if the book was going to be playful, that playfulness had to be hard won and a little perverted and grim. Fun! Second, ironically, I found that all the intimate stories I had originally planned on sharing, all the creative performativity, were simply ways of hiding. Oh. It is *so* easy for me to share personal details in public. To fuck around theatrically. After all, I'm trans, and I've been trained into it. It's what I call an "intimate deadening" in the book.[2] No vulnerability at all. What truly terrified me was simply putting out the theory itself, entirely naked, as a gesture of intimacy in its own right. True vulnerability requires the possibility of rejection, of taking a leap.

And this was certainly a leap. After all, I was returning to the philosophical issues that had tormented me just prior to my coming out and transitioning in 1995. I was trying to describe, in a theoretical way, something about my gender phoria for which, I felt, there were no adequate concepts and, indeed, which seemed to go against what philosophy had to say about self and subject. At the time, when I tried to write about this stuff at UCLA, I just ended up feeling increasingly isolated, weird, and opaque—disconnected from reality. This is precisely why I turned to (or was, by others, guided into) early modern conceptions of self. I needed the distance between myself and the content. To take another stab at it—to try to articulate this messy stuff in words—to put it out there—well, *that* was fucking vulnerable.

Now imagine receiving a letter from me—perhaps by email, perhaps by "snail mail." The letter is mailed from Los Angeles in 2025. Perhaps you receive it in 2025. Or 2026. And perhaps you are reading it somewhere in Berlin. Or somewhere in Tijuana. Or in Toronto. Or in Lima. Perhaps you are my friend. Perhaps you want to be. Or, perhaps you dislike me or have no interest in me. Or perhaps you have a prurient interest in the sordid details of a trans life and are about to be sorely disappointed.

This letter comes to you as an intimate gesture in case you are interested in beginning or deepening our connection (if you have no desire for connection, the letter will thwart your efforts to draw anything of value from it). And you must decide what to do with it. This will likely require some interpretive work on your part. In fact, it will probably require that you add something to the letter that was not there. And, in the end, you will have to decide whether you are even going to reply to it or not, and if so, how. You might merely acknowledge the gesture. Or, you might share of yourself too. And how you share yourself, how much, in what way. Well, that's a decision too.

I imagined this book, at any rate, as an intimate gesture, saying. "Hi! This is where I'm coming from. Wanna make some good trouble?" As such, I regarded it as merely part of an evolving process—a contribution that joined into a longer conversation or, rather, plurality of conversations, that had already been unfolding and would continue to unfold long after. Of course, those of us who do this sort of work know that there is never one "audience." We are always writing for different people, situated differently in terms of motivation, politics, culture, geography, time, and, of course, much more. So, I was trying to have different conversations with different people, and these conversations were intimate or distant in varying degrees. In fact, I was trying to start up new conversations across barriers of mutual unintelligibility. How to create, interpersonally, new meanings—new possibilities for intimacy and distance? These were the aims that shaped my "Essay."

REPLY TO MARVIN AND BESS

Understanding the intention of the book thusly is important in addressing what I take to be, in various ways, a shared concern among all my interlocuters—namely, that I do not provide as much attention as they would like to specific contexts involving specific people located in specific locations at specific times. This concern is, I think, pressed the most vigorously in Amy and Isobel's remarks about my failure to attend to literal (actual, material) space in any detail. As they put it, the book "has situated us a bit too far beyond space."[3]

There are two ways to understand their worry. One concerns the role of literal space with regards to my theory of interpersonal spatiality. The other concerns the question whether I attend to people, situations, places, and contexts with enough specificity and, if not, whether this has any theoretical implications.

My reply to the first version of the worry is simply to agree with it. There is much more to say about the relation of intimacy/distance to space than is said in the book. This is because I did not have enough "space" in the book to include everything I wanted to say about space in the world. I was working against a word limit, and I had to make choices.

I am, however, quite interested in how interpersonal boundaries are sensitive to things like buildings, rooms, notions of inside and outside. Sex, for example, is allocated to "inside" in the dominant world, and, consequently, fucking "in public" is constituted as transgressive. Proper appearance, likewise, is sensitive to literal space. Try showing up to a summer barbeque in a tuxedo. Try showing

up to a church in a bikini. All of this would have been theorized had I had enough "space." But I didn't.

Happily, however, this essay is part of a much larger body of work that I have been developing over decades. And I hope to continue to develop it for at least a little while longer. I expect that I will write on the topic at some point. That said, there is absolutely no reason why somebody else couldn't take what I've already said and simply develop it for themself, in their own way. At any rate, I never, for one minute, said this was the final account. This is why I wrote in the Preface, "So here it is. Yet another provisional attempt at articulating an idea that will have to be further articulated down the line."[4]

The second version of the worry is more concerning to me—namely, that I do not attend to people, situations, places, and contexts with enough specificity. Is the worry that the theory has not been *informed* by such specificities and that it is therefore inadequate? For example, they write, "we are trans in space, which is to say we're trans at home, we're trans on the bus, we're trans in the woods, and we're trans at the museum. In each of these and countless other spaces, being trans means something different."[5] On this version of the worry, the idea is that my account cannot accommodate this.

However, my account is specifically designed to be able to handle these concerns. First, as I said, interpersonal boundaries are sensitive to entities and places that exist in social space as well as the individuals with whom we interact and the character of the relationship (or lack thereof) that we have with them. Second, because I understand systems of interpersonal spatiality in terms of María Lugones's account of worlds, a contingency and variability is precisely to be expected in certain shifts in the social.

Perhaps, however, their worry is simply that the book ought to have expressly included more details about specific people, situations, places, and contexts. One obvious reply to this worry is that this is just not that kind of book (it's a theory book) and there is no reason to expect that all projects be alike. Or, at least, I don't *think* all projects should be alike, if we endorse methodological pluralism in trans philosophy, *as we should*. In any event, one can't do *everything* at once without writing a very, very, very long book and, as a consequence, the expectation that all trans philosophical investigations deal solely or even mostly in concrete detail would undercut the ability to develop trans theory to any meaningful degree. I'm pleased to say, however, that they will find precisely that sort of work in my forthcoming co-authored chapter "Reality Enforcement as Structural Violence in Lima, Peru." My hope is that others might also find the theory useful, find practical applications for it as it is pertinent (or not pertinent) to their specific situations.

Here, however, we also ought to acknowledge that the methodology involved in philosophizing specific contexts involving specific people located in specific locations at specific times is scarcely innocuous. Does one set oneself up as the outside observer, the witness? How, then, does one avoid academic extractivism? If, on the contrary, one writes as a member of the community, how does one share one's own stories without sharing the stories of one's friends? (This was one of my many problems with the book in its earlier state. Many of my stories involved other people—mostly friends—and I felt that it was not appropriate to share something so intimate. Indeed, in some cases, the stories seemed like they weren't my stories to tell.) In both strategies—from outside and from the inside—one faces very similar challenges. How does one avoid turning lives into useful case studies? How does one avoid profiting from the experiences of others? How does one avoid making public intimate events when one has no right to do such a thing? I am *not* saying that these challenges can't be surmounted. I *am* saying that they need to be acknowledged as a feature of this approach.

Let me conclude this reply by returning to a critical feature of the book—namely, it is not supposed to be only a theory book about intimacy. On the contrary, my hope was to enact a gesture of intimacy *through* the book (or rather various gestures) and to thereby pave the way for actual encounters. To put it differently, philosophy occurs *in the world* and the sharing of and attention to ideas, their transformation, their return back to sender *is* quite particular. *Like the writing and reading of a letter, this book affords actual encounters*. I wanted the writing and reading of the theory, the responding to it, to themselves constitute *specific moments of intimacy*. That is, I wanted to help *engende*r specific interpersonal situations at specific times, cultural milieus, and spatial locations. And *this* is what we are doing *right now*.

On this point, I am grateful to Amy and Isobel (and also Tamsin) for talking about the larger context of trans sociality in which I have participated and continue to participate. It is true that I try to show up and to help build community to the best of my ability. I learned from my early experiences in trans community in the nineties that this is absolutely critical for our survival and flourishing. What is the point of even doing trans philosophy if we are not there for each other? I agree that quite often this "being there for each other"—this trans sociality—itself constitutes a kind of trans philosophical practice. Indeed. How else could we philosophize?

So, it is precisely within this larger context of trans sociality that I hope this essay is received. I hope that it is understood as an offering to others—trans and otherwise oppressed others—an offering of a trans theory that is, hopefully, applicable and useful. However, I also hope that it is understood as an expression of part of my existential identity, to those willing to receive it.[6] These ideas have been in the works over a long period of time. And they do not come from an armchair. Rather, they have been developed over time through hard work and community building, within the context of my life lived with others. Sharing these ideas with you is about as naked as I can get.

REPLYING TO PITTS

Javier's understandable question about this book is whether it exhibits a universalizing tendency that runs contrary to my commitment to Lugonian ontological pluralism.[7] One way of taking this concern is as a point about the theory

of interpersonal spatiality as well as the new concepts that I deploy within that theory. Am I not proposing a universal account that is not sensitive to the multiplicity of worlds, and more than that, the movements in-between worlds, the grasping and attending, that occurs in the moments of creating new meaning, new possibilities? There's a lot here in the worry.

There are multiple ways I'd like to address it. First, I think it's important to keep in mind the metaphilosophical project that I outlined at the beginning. It is within the spirit of this project that the actual theory of interpersonal spatiality is offered. While the theory itself may come off as "this is the way it is," it is not actually intended as an account of the life, the universe, and everything as if it were a grand European treatise. It is, rather, an opening up on my part—"This is what I've come up with in trying to make sense of my experiences. What do you think? Do you find it useful? Can I be made sense of?" It's *personal*.

Second, I think that concepts like "interpersonal spatiality" go no further than Lugones's own concepts of "ontological pluralism," "active subjectivity," and "complex communication." After all, Lugones offers them as if they were simply true and accurate characterizations of how things are. Is her own notion of 'active subjectivity' supposed to apply universally? Is Lugones at risk of taking her own reflections, limited by her location(s), and then transforming them into a total vision that is, rather than universally applicable, local and limited? No doubt. But, then, again, I understand her concepts in the same way that I understand my own—namely, offered up in the hopes that they will be useful from a liberatory standpoint. The litmus test is surely a pragmatic one. Do they work? To what extent?

Let's dig into the notions of interpersonal spatiality a bit. Let me start by clarifying what I mean by "transcendental." By "transcendental," I did *not* mean to suggest any agreement with Victor Turner who, unlike Lugones, posits an ego outside of the social. Nor do I mean to suggest that there exist entities such boundaries, pathways, and the like, outside of the social. On the contrary, I insist that all boundaries, pathways, and the like, are fully immanent in the social and, in particular, gestures of intimacy and distance. By "transcendental" I meant only to flag a particular way of arguing: In order for x to be possible, it is necessary that y. In my case, I argued that in order for interpersonal spatiality to be possible, it is necessary that there be something like boundaries, etc. This may or may not be right. But that's it. That's all that "transcendental" comes to. So, let's dig down deeper.

One of the presuppositions of the book is, of course, that "we" all experience each other through modes of closeness, distance, and in-between. Who is the "we"? Human beings? Perhaps that's a good first approximation. However, the very concept "human being" is political, philosophical, and stained with blood. I certainly wouldn't want to unreflexively presuppose the concept in a work intended to investigate it. Instead, I understand the "we" as an invitation to engage. It is open to whomever can engage with it. This openness is corroded, no doubt, by the fact that the book is written in English and not (yet) available in other languages. The worry at present, however, is the book *presupposes* a capacity for intimacy and distance. That is, the worry is that the book purports to universalize a capacity for intimacy thereby risking dangerous foreclosure. On this point, however, I agree with Lugones, who also expressly links intimate interactions and resistance.[8] I simply don't know what it would be to engage in resistance, forms of coalitional relations with others, without possibilities of intimacy. I don't know how to go beyond it.

The question of the validity of the specific theory, however, is another matter altogether. My theory posits notions such as interpersonal boundaries, gestures of intimacy, pathways, strips, and the like. And it could well be that this theory is biased by my own cultural locations. First, it could well be that the theory I unfold includes elements that are, rather than features of interpersonal spatiality per se, features of the specific worlds I inhabit. This distortion is something I acknowledge. And I can only express my hope that the ideas I offer are taken up as a shared project that can be corrected and improved. That is the intent.

Second, however, it could well be that the very notions I deploy (e.g., "boundary") are themselves useful only in worlds relatively local to my own. In this case, it may be that there are different forms of intimacy—some that are well accommodated by my theory, and others that are not. For instance, I think it is fair to speak of an intimacy with nonhuman animals—the shared warmth of bodies in contact. And while relations with pets, for instance, are governed by boundaries in particular systems of interpersonal spatiality, the intimacy I speak of now (shared warmth) is not captured by boundaries at all. In this case, I think I would simply acknowledge that existence of this sort of intimacy and then clarify that it is not the sort of intimacy I aim to explain. The one I purport to explain is shot through with interpersonal constraints—constraints that are not inherent in the more basic, visceral one. Crucially, the one I purport to explain is quite close to Lugones's way of thinking of intimacy—namely, as interwoven social life among people who are not acting in an official capacity.

I *do* think my theory could get into trouble should it turn out that there are worlds in which interwoven social life and resistance do not involve interpersonal boundaries at all. In such a case, my theory would have to be rejected as it stands. We would need to ask whether it could be rethought in a way that better accommodated modes of regulated intimacy for which the notion of boundaries, etc., prove inadequate. And if it couldn't, we would need to ask what of use could be preserved in it, if any at all. Here, the book could be regarded as a box of philosophical ideas that could be used, modified, or rejected. My hope, of course, is that it would still have some value.

There is yet another way of understanding Javier's concern—one that connects more closely with the notion of worlds, the phenomenon of existing between worlds, and the very capacity for worldly creation. Javier suggests that the book is written from the perspective of the dominant world, and if they mean by that "solely," then I don't think that's true. The book is written from my location

as informed by experiences in Los Angeles subcultures, from that vantage point of double perception, that can recognize both dominant and resistant worlds. I would add that I think that the very representation of the "dominant world" is going to depend upon one's resistant location—that is, where one is located in the limen. Quite expressly, then, the book is written from that limited perspective, with an intention to engage.

However, it may be that Javier is worried that, because I focus so much on *systems* of intimacy (both dominant and resistant), I do not allow for the possibility of intimacies and distances *between* systems and the possibility for the creation of new intimacies. If so, I think the worry is misplaced. The crucial notions of *anticipatory vulnerability* and *infraintimacy*[9] as well as my development of complex interpersonal spatiality, modeled on Lugones's complex communication[10] are intended precisely to capture these inter-worldly and world creative possibilities. And they are central to my project. Let me discuss a few of these notions now.

By "anticipatory vulnerability" I mean the vulnerability one experiences in being open to different interpretations in different worlds. For instance, when a trans person is open with a nontrans person sexually, their body (or, rather, "intimate person") is exposed not only within a system of interpersonal spatiality in a trans friendly underworld, but, also, open to uptake within the abusive system of the overworld. To achieve intimacy in such a context requires not only that one's partner not subject one to such uptake, but, also, that one's partner understand one's complex vulnerability. By the "infraintimate," I mean to capture the way in which unintelligibility may function as a form of protection from exposure to another. To the oblivious member of the overworld, for instance, the sort of vulnerability discussed here is not available. Consequently, the trans person, while invalidated, has maintained a sort of privacy through this obliviousness.

I regard such notions as central to both the content and operations of the book. First, in what is the turning point of the book, I attempt to explain pre-transition self-recognition in terms of what I call the blank open—an idea that turns crucially on the notion of the infraintimate. The very event of recognition—apparitional liminality—is all about existing in a state that anticipates resistant modes of intimacy and distances, in-between one's constitution in the dominant world and the plethora of anticipated possibilities. Here, one is in-between one's structural constitution as merely make-believing, "make-believe" as a veritable opening to new socialities.

This section is particularly important as it involves making sense of my own transitional experiences. As such, it constitutes a return to my failed, vulnerable-making attempts to do the same, back in the nineties. Here, I reach out to the poetic theorizing of Anzaldúa for help, as I grasp for answers.[11] Here, in this crucial moment, I find myself in "cracks and shadows between worlds." And it is here, also, that I find inspiration for understanding and perhaps even achieving complex intimacies and distances (i.e., interpersonal spatialities) across a thick limen in which we are multiple in multiple ways. Not to quote myself. *But to quote myself*:

> I would like to further suggest the structural invisibility of another's liminality—precisely their unintelligibility—provides for their infraintimate privacy and protection, their sense of containment. Like the state of the blank open, so central in pretransition self-recognition, a pause in recognition of a hidden depth holds the anticipation of intimate gestures—gestures not predetermined [by some system, my insert] but perhaps, resonant, formed in the crucible of the infraintimate. Here, we must start with the presumption of unfathomable existential depth—a capacity for intimate vulnerability far beyond one's ken. It is precisely through this recognition that a permeable boundary can be recognized—not a block but an observation, a deep breath necessary for self-display and therefore intimacy.[12]

REPLYING TO BRIGGS

My reply to Ray could be very short. If it were, it would go something like this: *Thank you, Ray. I agree with pretty much everything you say.* However, such a brief reply would be grossly unfair to Ray who has clearly put in a lot of work trying to make sense of my views, as well as deep thought into taking the views in new directions. I do want to begin by saying thank you to Ray, though. I felt very much understood in their account of my views. I felt seen and reflected in their words.

Before I dive into what I think Ray contributes and why I think they're largely right, I also want to point out that one of the ways I felt understood by Ray is simply by their recognition that they should feel free to pick up what I was saying, change it, add to it, determine whether and, if so, how it could be applied to more specific contexts than discussed in the book. I felt that they were trying to figure out what they could get out of the thing and how they might use it for their own investigations. This is indeed what I hope for this Essay—namely, that it might be useful, might be expanded, corrected, further developed, applied, and the like. I don't see it as my property.

Now, to understand Ray's project, it's crucial to begin with their understanding of "world," which is largely the same as my own understanding and which is, I hope, largely the same as Lugones's. The relevant point for our purposes is this: Just because some world is an underworld, formed in tense resistance to some form of oppression, doesn't mean that it isn't oppressive in other ways. In fact, it doesn't mean that it doesn't retain some aspects of the very oppression it is attempting to resist. This has to do, in part, with the way intermeshed oppressions show up as (or are treated as) separate vectors which build implicit privilege within those vectors. In other words, this is Crenshaw 101.[13] Let me note that this is in part what Javier has in mind when they worry about "cracks and shadows between worlds." Such cracks and shadows are necessary when one is confronted by worlds that invariably oppress in one way or another. It is there, if anywhere, that creative resistance will be possible and it is why coalition across multiple oppressions is crucial.

Now, Ray's analysis focuses specifically on the mythology surrounding the "physical person" and sexual desire that I describe in the book. What might be called the core mythology is this: Intimate appearance, unlike proper appearance, is "natural" and "pre-cultural." It is the thing (the "naked body") which exists *underneath* clothing—clothing which then serves to block sensory access to this pre-cultural thing. In extending my analysis of the folk system, I begin to provide an account of the "heterorelational complex."

In this complex, the core mythology is extended to link male and female intimate appearances to notions of sexual desire. Specifically, I posit the following beliefs: (1) The female naked body is imagined to be the source of male sexual desire. (2) Sexual desire is conceived of as something like a powerful force that, once set into motion, can hardly be stopped. (3) The female naked body is regarded as inherently subject to violation unless some mitigating cultural intervention occurs. (4) The preceding three are natural features of sexuality. To this list, Ray adds the following for men: (5) Men are regarded as always desiring of and ready for sex. (6) The male naked body is regarded as inherently violating. (7) The preceding two are natural features of sexuality.

I am grateful for these additions as I think they make the mythology clearer. Sketching out the mythology embedded in a system is challenging because one must rely on one's own limited experiences and also because this mythology is itself often obscure and even incoherent. Let me explain that the reason the mythology, as I outlined it, concerned only women is because I wanted to emphasize the way in which women are marked as intimate while men are regarded as standard. My thought was that only in the presence of women does the mythology become explicit (for men). So, I thought that this mythology was more closely associated with the female physical person and that the male physical person was simply read in terms of that mythology reciprocally when the mythology was activated.

Regardless of whether this is right, it is clear that the mythology as I outline it is not sufficiently precise. I think that, drawing on Ray's (6), (3) should be modified by inserting "by men." Thus, (3*) The female naked body is regarded as inherently subject to violation by the male naked body unless some mitigating cultural intervention occurs. This would incorporate Ray's (6) while also making it more precise too by specifying that the male naked body is only regarded as inherently violating *to female naked bodies*. (Think of men in a shared shower or locker room.)

Ray's (5) is a crucial addition. I think I vaguely thought that something like the "always ready to go" notion was included in my (2). But it's actually not, and it does need to be explicitly mentioned. Moreover, Ray's specification that this is *male* sexual desire and not a universal sexual desire points to an issue that I was attempting to skirt somewhat. (2) says "Sexual desire is conceived of as something like a powerful force that, once set into motion, can hardly be stopped." But this is clearly more applicable to men than it is women. I formulated it universally, however, because I was also thinking of the way in which women are sometimes mythologically regarded as repressing an almost terrifying (to men) libido that once released turns women into insatiable sex fiends. This mythology, of course, plays a significant role in blaming the victim in cases of sexual assault (by men). That said, such mythology is not always in play. Other times women are represented as less sexually desirous than men. So, we find here a case in which the folk mythology is variable and possibly inconsistent.

Ray's question is this: How comes it that even though gay and lesbian underworlds reject the heterorelational complex, transphobia still persists there? And their answer is that some of this heterorelational complex is retained in these worlds, even though it is rejected in other respects. To explain this, Ray turns to the heterorelational mythology discussed above. Ray is more cautious and sophisticated in their answer, but if I were to put it crudely, it would go like this. In lesbian communities what we often find is that while (1) and (2) are rejected, (3) and (6) are retained. In gay male communities, what we often find is that while (1) and (6) are rejected, (2) and (5) are accepted (and (3) is possibly accepted).

I think I mostly agree with this. My one caveat would concern (1). While it is true that in both lesbian and gay communities, the linkage between female naked bodies and male sexual desire is shattered, there is a deeper feature of (1) that is retained. This is the very idea that the naked body can be a source of desire at all. I say this because the naked body is itself a mythological entity. It doesn't exist. On the contrary, sexual desire, I argue, concerns the culturally constituted intimate appearance. Or, rather, it concerns *both* the proper and intimate appearance and the movement of the former to the latter.

I want to conclude my discussion of Ray's comments by expanding their investigation as a conversational response to their expansion of mine. For me, what is important is not only the mythology at work in the folk system, but also the organized social practices. I am interested in the way folk mythology motivates engagement in certain social practices while, at the same time, both obscuring their true character and contributing to their very constitution. For example, the false belief in a naked body that exists prior to cultural intervention obscures the existence of intimate appearance as a social phenomenon. In light of this, it is important to stress that the main reason that reality enforcement and the deceiver/pretender representations continue to exist in lesbian and gay underworlds is because sex-differentiated proper appearance continues to represent sex-differentiated intimate appearance—a practice that does exist in many trans underworlds.

I say this not as a critique of Ray who, no doubt, recognizes this. I say it because it opens up further avenues of investigation concerning the nature of sexual practices in gay and lesbian underworlds—how they depart, how they do not from the straight overworlds. For example, how is homosocial space (e.g., locker rooms) altered in gay contexts? How is intimacy eroticized in different ways? What movements of intimacy are eroticized and what movements are not? How do these practices replicate the heterosexual

sexual practices and how do they not? How do the beliefs that constitute the operative mythology motivate these practices while obscuring their true character? These are interesting questions, I think, that ought to be pursued.

REPLYING TO KIMOTO

Tamsin opens up three lines of inquiry in her comments, which I'd like to take in reverse order. The first (or last) concerns trans sexuality. I understand Tamsin's comments as an invitation to say more about sexuality—both the ways in which trans people are perniciously objectified and the ways in which we use sexual practices resistantly to affirm and reconstitute ourselves. I agree that so much more can be said on this topic than is said in the book and that saying it is an important project. In earlier versions of the essay, my discussion of sexuality was more extensive. Alas, given the word limit, I needed to make cuts and this discussion needed to be shortened. This is indeed a topic I plan on exploring in greater depth. In fact, I have already started with the forthcoming co-authored essay "Fucking Hopeless Romantics: Trans Women, (Nontrans) Men, and the Failures of Intimacy." This essay looks specifically at the various forms of eroticism that motivate nontrans men to seek out trans women, the obstacles that undermine actual relationships, and the types of harm that are inflicted on us. Notably, rather than focusing on "objectification" as an overarching harm, we provide more specificity by describing what we call "de-realization," "fetishization," and "sexualization."

Admittedly, I do tend to dwell on the negative. And Tamsin is right that more needs to be said about positive, resistant forms of sexuality. Tamsin says that my brief discussion of trans sexual recoding practices makes it seem that they are mere temporary reprieves rather than crucial underworldly practices. If I do unintentionally make it seem like that, I need to clarify that I actually agree with Tamsin's take. In fact, I regard these sexual recoding practices as operating in tandem with the more public practice of disconnecting proper appearance from intimate appearance, so that the former no longer declares, in advance, not only the morphology of the individual, but also the location and nature of their boundaries. Leaving the boundaries unknown and indeterminate, allows for a new sort of intimacy—namely, the discovery of the boundaries or even the mutual creation of the boundaries within sexual contexts via intimate gestures along pathways—pathways that may well be laid down in the moment.

Let me conclude this part of the reply by noting that I have a powerful resource for pursuing a deeper investigation of trans sexuality, both the negative and positive variations—namely, the concept of "erotic structuralism" which I develop in the essay "When Selves Have Sex." Here I argue that the content of eroticism has a structure which includes oneself, another, and the relations and activities between. More specifically, I argue that the most basic form of eroticism (at least in the folk system) involves the eroticization of increased intimacy between oneself and another. One of the important upshots of this view is that recoding can occur not only via intimate gestures but through eroticism itself—particularly overlapping eroticisms in intimate encounters. At any rate, as Tamsin notes, there is so much to be investigated here. Who knows? Perhaps we can pursue some of this together?

A second line of investigation that Tamsin pursues concerns my views on the coloniality of intimacy. In this section, I connect the mythology of clothing and naked body to racist colonial views about the alleged primitivity or animality of non-Europeans. Tamsin points out that there are different ways to be viewed as not human besides being viewed as an animal. "If we look, for example, to the archives of yellow peril and orientalism," she notes, "what we will find are myriad references to the Asian as machine or robot-like in their capacity for labor."

Tamsin suggests that this complicates my analysis. I sort of agree with that, although I would prefer to say, "enriches." One of the key points I try to make in my discussion of racist dehumanization is precisely that it is quite complicated. Not all colonizers held the same view; claims about humanity were varied and contested. Further, the views themselves did not treat the colonized as homogenous; West Africans were viewed differently than indigenous Americans. Finally, the very concepts of human and person were undergoing profound transformation and generative pressure. Tamsin is opening a line of investigation that does complicate what I think is already complicated.

While I can't do justice to the sort of inquiry Tamsin proposes, I can introduce a few speculations about the relationship between the inhuman and clothing. Here, as always, we must distinguish between the mythology and the actual constitution of pathways and persons that this mythology both obscures and enables. Starting with this former—one difference between the primitive or animal is that there is a perceived failure to achieve a level of culture that they ought to achieve (they ought to be dressed and civilized, but here they are naked and savage). In the case of robots, there is no such failure because there is no expectation in the first place. Think, for instance, of the robotic hosts in HBO's *Westworld*. When they are being built or repaired, they are invariably "naked" but in a way that suggests that whether or not they are clothed is entirely irrelevant. One might as well view clothing as parts of the machine or even mere accoutrements. Turning to the latter, the question is how such mythology tracked differential treatment in terms of interpersonal boundaries. Did it lead to different forms of abuse in the way that while white women were subject to intimate disregard (i.e., unreciprocated vulnerability) those who were viewed as mere animals were subject to outright boundary violation? And if so, what did the differences amount to?

I'll conclude this part of my reply by noting that in reality, we are all, in the folk system, different sorts of "vestorg" (on the analogy of cyborg). Instead of a fusion of flesh and metal, however, we are a fusion of flesh and fabric. That is, socially constituted artifacts partially constitute what we are. In light of this, I think that Tamsin's remark about "the synthetic and animal histories of the estrogen I inject into my left thigh" fits beautifully.

Tamsin's final (i.e., first) line of inquiry concerns my opening positionality statement linking me to underworlds

in Los Angeles (between 1994–2022). Here, Tamsin invites me to share more of "what's present in the text that is specifically Angeleno" and to examine some of "the tensions such a positioning might engender as well as the insights it generates." Tamsin shares about her own time in Los Angeles, noting that she didn't feel comfortable transitioning there because "the girls served too hard." (I wonder if she thinks that somehow I did manage to serve hard enough. LOL.) And she asks for "the intimate markers of how an Angeleno might make sense of trans that differed from my own sense, which is in many ways indebted to the US South." Before I try to answer this invitation, I want to note an important insight offered by Tamsin. The insight is that the character of trans gender phoria is, at least to some extent, shaped by geography. (While Tamsin is right that my text invites this idea, I must confess that I hadn't thought of it with the sort of clarity that Tamsin has articulated it.) Now, on to my answer.

Part of my answer is simply that bringing out the specificity of Los Angeles was never my intention. Rather, I had simply wanted to locate myself, my experience, and my work to prevent "universalization" and to give credit where credit was due. The other part of my answer is just "I don't know." I've never experienced trans in the South, so I wouldn't know how to draw out the differences. To put it differently, the idea of something that is "specifically Angeleno" doesn't make sense to me without some sort of contrast (much in the way that "accents" rely on contrasts). Either that, or one must draw on stereotypes about locations—for example, Los Angeles holding very high (normative) beauty standards because of the "industry."

The truth is—the Westside is very different from the rest of Los Angeles. And I lived in West Hollywood and Hollywood. (There was a marked tension between the gay upwardly mobile West Hollywood and the Hollywood where trans women worked at night.) I also found the worlds of trans women to be divided along racial lines and associated with distinct organizations that provided HIV-prevention services. (Meanwhile, trans men had worlds linked to community organizations they had grown themselves.) And feminine beauty standards differed significantly among different racialized worlds.

My own relationship to these worlds was complicated not only by my whiteness, but by my class privilege and affiliation with a university (both as a grad student and as a professor). Connections were made first on the basis of a shared commitment to activism and on the basis of shared experiences with harassment and dating challenges. That said, age, quasi-passability, and relative attractiveness no doubt played a role as well. But, then again, that was so long ago. My experiences in Los Angeles span decades, and things change over time.

I don't know whether there is anything that is a distinctively Angeleno trans experience. But I do know that Los Angeles is a city that has no center. Rather, it has many centers. And the way to find one's way there is to build one's own LA through friendships and other connections. In this respect, I suppose Lugones's ontological pluralism made so much sense to me because it was so characteristic of the multiplicity I experienced in trans worlds and in the city in general. There were so many worlds. And I could, in some ways, help build new worlds. *But, then again, that was so long ago, she said, waxing nostalgic.*

Alas, this discussion of space and, in the end, Los Angeles, is ironic. As some people may know, I made the decision recently to leave behind what was my home for over thirty-five years. Given my status as a trans woman, a green card holder, and an outspoken academic, I was no longer feeling safe in the United States. Because of this, I returned to my first home—Canada—leaving the life I had built behind. While I am beginning to find a new life here, I am also mourning the loss of so much of myself. So much of who I am, was, as a trans woman. And as a philosopher. And as a friend. And human being.

I think that one day, I will be able to write about this most recent transition. And when I am able, I expect that I will have quite a lot more to say philosophically about space, place, and time. How much I will share about the details of my private life and the lives of my friends, however, is an open question that really depends on so many factors, of course. Until then, however, I will simply try to live my life. On to the next chapter.

NOTES

1. Steven Wright "one liner."
2. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 51.
3. Marvin and Bess, "Trans Space Is the Place," 6.
4. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, x.
5. Marvin and Bess, "Trans Space Is the Place," 5.
6. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 170–71.
7. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*.
8. Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," 743.
9. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 85.
10. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 171–73.
11. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/la frontera*.
12. Bettcher, *Beyond Personhood*, 173.
13. Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection."

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