

Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory

ISSN: 0740-770X (Print) 1748-5819 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwap20>

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To cite this article: Eva Hayward (2010) Spider city sex, *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, 20:3, 225-251, DOI: [10.1080/0740770X.2010.529244](https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2010.529244)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2010.529244>



Published online: 31 Jan 2011.



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Spider city sex

Eva Hayward*

Women's Studies, Duke University, Durham, NC, USA

In her essay “Dungeon Intimacies” (2005) Susan Stryker offers “auto-ethnography” as a methodology for theorizing embodiment and politics. She invites us to see how corporeality situates more generalizable knowledges. Following Stryker, this essay explores male-to-female transsexual transitioning in an urban setting, San Francisco’s Tenderloin, through bodily experience. These accounts might appear as drifts in personal recollection, but they are meant to suggest, however speculatively, and without aiming toward universalizing, the sensuous transaction between body and environment. Apprehending the interplay of sensation and place, I suggest, requires an attention to streets, buildings, and sidewalks, but also other non-humans. Guided by figural and literal spiders and the effects of hormone replacement therapy in the form of horse urine (Premarin), this essay proffers that transsexuality is relational in terms of social, economic, and political milieus as well as spatial, affective, and speciated registers.

Keywords: transsexuality; space; sensation; species

Being neighborly

Neighborhood? The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that neighborhoods are “a community; a number of people who live close together; a vicinity or surrounding area.” We are also told that they are “the quality, condition, or fact of being situated near to someone or something; nearness, proximity.” A neighborhood: people moving along streets on foot, or by car or bicycle; cellphones vibrating and ensuing conversations; pigeons shitting on the eaves of buildings; federal and state policies subtending urban plans; hot days fill alleyways with the stink of urine, rotting food, vomit, and unimaginable things; traffic lights directing movements; city sounds building-out scale and volume; eateries and shops indulging the walker with window scenes. A neighborhood is a bumptious coherence of bodies, ecosystems, communities, buildings, and sensations.

Out of the midst of this bustle, I want to ask an eccentric question, an interrogative that borders on incoherence: How do transsexuals living in neighborhoods experience the contiguous nature of neighborhoods in relationship to their sexual transitioning? Not all transsexuals transition, certainly many do not, but I am specifically interested in those bodies that alter themselves through surgeries and

*Email: evahayward@gmail.com

hormones. How might places come to matter in the changing of one's sex? How do the intensities, energies, and forces that accompany transsexual transitions shape and reshape a neighborly self? What is the somatic sociality of trans-becoming? By trans-becoming, I mean an emergence of a material, psychical, sensual, and social self through corporeal, spatial, and temporal processes that trans-form the lived body. Rather than accounting for transsexuality as a psychological condition, or a purely sociological production, or even as some biological imperative, I offer a supplemental reading that is about the expressiveness of trans-bodies. I'm not proposing that these other registers of interpretation are without merit, however I wonder what else can be asked about the experience of transitioning in an effort to de-ontologize absolutism. This essay is an experiment in description, working across disciplinary lines of visual, science, and transgender studies so as to explore the conditions of transsexual transitioning, or trans-becoming, what makes transsexuality possible, what apprehensions transsexuality entails and elaborates.

Bodies, according to Alphonso Lingis, are collectivities, constitutive materializations generated through movements and provocations. He writes:

The form and the substance of our bodies are not clay shaped by Jehovah and then driven by his breath; they are coral reefs full of polyps, sponges, gorgonians, and free-swimming macrophages continually stirred by monsoon climates of moist air, blood, and bile. (2000, 28)

For Lingis, bodies are not only respiring and digesting collectives, but are incitements, creative reactions such that "they are movements and affects, differentials of speed that compose, intensities that materialize their force" (29). We move with the world, "we move in an environment of air currents, rustling trees, and animate bodies" (29). In addition to being composites, Lingis contends that bodies are also always bindings of excitations, affections, and sensations. My goal is to adopt Lingis's conceptualization, and develop a reading of the transitioning body as a material force, and transsexuality as an expression of bodily capacities. So, I offer that the transitional body is a reactivated, refreshed, and resourced sensuous body, a phenomenological topography of affects and percepts that are changed in order to feel transposed states of corporeality. If transsexuals re-energize bodily boundaries or inscriptions, then space and time are reinvigorated as creative impingements on the organization, mapping, and coagulation of the trans-self. Encounters between morphing bodies and buildings might be understood, then, as energetic provocations in which expression and rhythm pulse among bodies: manifesting, emerging, transitioning.

Victor Burgin (1997), Elizabeth Grosz (2001), Catherine Ingraham (2006), Anthony Vidler (1991), and others have evocatively articulated the notion that cities are corporeal manifestations, assemblages of organs and building media that resonate with subjective states. Burgin writes:

In this space [city] it is not simply that the boundaries are "porous" but that the subject itself is soluble. This space is the source of bliss and of terror, of the "oceanic" feeling and of the feeling of coming apart, just as it is at the origin of feelings of being invaded, overwhelmed, suffocated. (1997, 116)

In problematizing a range of binary oppositions between space and flesh, psyche and architecture, Burgin argues for interaction between the social and the individual such that bodies are condensations of situated sites that paradoxically risk wholeness, integrity, cohesion through the administrations of street grids, building codes, planes of concrete. Urban embodiment, the architecture of a *cityself*, rests on the generative overlap between openness and containment. Following Burgin's lead, an environment, a zone, and its inhabitants are also re-inscribed into the body through its alteration of sensorium. For example, a body feels itself being organized by the sidewalk, the speed of passing vehicles; or, I brush-up against buildings, smelling and touching them, seeking shelter from the rain as I walk downtown. What about transitioning? How might hormones, for example, retool sensuousness in relation to the city, the neighborhood? Do surgeries and their healings impact the trans-self in space; that is to ask, does flesh re-meet the world?

Transitioning is already movement, re-inscription, because transitioning is not the first subjective emergence – though it may feel as such – but is nevertheless a remarkable state of intensifying the unhomely body's limits so as to feel “at home” in the body (Prosser 1998). Transsexuals do not transcend the body; embodiment is created through the body. There is no absolute division, but continuities between the corporeal, affective, and sensual responses of different historical bodily states. Layered, trans-bodies can never be collapsed bodies or borderless forms, despite the interpretive efforts of such theorists as Rosi Braidotti (2002) and her “transsexual imaginary” and Jean Baudrillard's (2002) futuristic transsexual, both of which postulate trans-sex as a trope for disintegration, a floating signifier for the trouble with modernity. Braidotti and Baudrillard – perhaps they would revolt against their pairing, but this is partly my point – use cultural anxieties about transsexuals to mobilize sexual panic and reinvigorate normative orderings.¹ Any number of autobiographical accounts by transsexuals reveal that trans-bodies are obviously real bodies, re-integrated integrities and cohesions framed by sociological, historical, and political forces and futures (Stone 1991; Prosser 1998; Stryker 2008; Hayward 2008). Transsexuals might unrest the frame of the body, rotate, convolute, or inflect, but only to reframe that body in the act of emerging.

Perhaps as a defensive position or as a narrative necessity, the discourse about trans-becoming is often delimited by the ways trans-identities resist or “transgress” gender/sex categories (Treut 1999; Hird 2002; Halberstam 2005; Stryker and Whittle 2006). This is important work, but if we set aside debates (without losing focus on their political import) about what sex/gender transsexuals have been or become, we might begin to recognize transsexuality as about more than gender/sex, conceivably about the *profuse* potential of bodily change, the ways bodies intensify (and are intensified by) habitats, environments, neighborhoods. Transsexuality might be articulated as discursive materialization, not essential, which is a resource or reach of flesh, organs, neuro-processes (Alaimo and Hekman 2007; Hayward 2008).

The specific neighborhood of trans-becoming that I want to engage is the Tenderloin in San Francisco. There are many peoples and histories – immigration, poverty, gay liberation – at play in this city space, but the thread I will pull, my one

line of investigation, is about transsexual women (Califia 1997; Hayward 2009). Even this thinning is too general. More nuanced stories could be unraveled about the genealogies of racial politics, struggles for sex-worker justice, and class discrepancies of transwomen in this neighborhood. Susan Stryker and Victor Silverman have made a documentary, *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria* (2005), which represents transgender political struggles and unlikely alliances with various social justice movements. They offer an intersectional arrangement of historical legacies and the rekindled activist energies still at work in the Tenderloin. My project is a narrowing of even Stryker's critical efforts by situating the current Diva's bar, 1081 Post Street, San Francisco, as a hub of transwomen activities in this neighborhood. This is somewhat an arbitrary center, but still Diva's is a nodal point of communion for many transwomen. Some of these women are sex workers, some are not; some women go to the bar seeking community, others pleasure. Some women are simply trying to survive, while others find that these streets and alleyways are full of violence. Transwomen of color, poor transwomen, feminine transgenders, immigrants seeking gendered refuge, *fa'afafine*, *kathoey*, *mahu*, and many others find a sense of belonging among the streets of Post, Geary, Polk, Turk, O'Farrell, and more. Diva's creates its own gravitational force, a place of coming together even if never visited, with many transwomen living in the surrounding area. I am one such woman. The area is not without danger or threat, creating a tension between "safety in numbers" and being highly visible (Halberstam 2005; Doan 2007, 2008). Sexual and physical harassment are a daily occurrence, but not easily in isolation.

In addition to transwomen, buildings, and streets, the neighborhood of Diva's is also an animated zone, a multispecies site. Pigeons, spiders, crows, rats, insects, pets, molds, viruses, and numerous others share the architectural forms with human selves and their intentions; they too are neighbors (Pavelka 1995; Hird 2004; Ingraham 2006; Bartkowski 2008). Perhaps it seems an unlikely linking of transsexual transitioning and urban space with animality, or risky in that trans-people may appear animalized, or reducing the lived struggles of animals to make anthropocentric claims (Daston and Mitman, 2005). However, for many who undergo hormonal and surgical alterations, the animal has always been present.² Eugen Steinach studied "Hormonal replacement therapy" through the surgical alterations of testes and ovaries in animals. He published two important papers, "Arbitrary transformation of male mammals into animals with pronounced female characteristics and feminine psyche" (1912) and "Feminization of males and masculinization of females" (1913), collected in his book *Sex and life: Forty years of biological and medical experiments* (1940), which became classics for thinking about the hormonal basis of sexuality. These transplantation techniques would inform later experimental surgeries on humans (Meyerowitz 2004). The first documented mtf sex change (1921) was a non-human ovary implantation. Animal experimentation and instrumentalization are enmeshed in the genealogies of becoming transsexual.

Premarin is a standard hormonal treatment for trans-women, consisting primarily of conjugated estrogens isolated from mare's urine.³ The story of Premarin is full of political contestation, horses kept in cycles of gestation and

impregnation so as to collect their urine. The effects of this non-human, non-bio-identical hormone are to immerse the body's organs in a chemical bath such that one's proprioceptive sense is as radically changed as external presentation: vision is distorted, one is disoriented by racking focus; haptic senses, to touch, are reworked making handled things feel like never before; sense of taste is refracted through hormonally changed buds; smells redefine space. The organization of thoughts is sometimes nervous, and at other times shot through with sublime bliss (Kirk 1999; Krenzer and Dana 2000; Moore, Wisniewski, and Dobs 2003; Hulshoff 2006). The expressive potential of the body, its capacity to respond to the world, is substantively modified, transforming the sensuous exchange of self and environment. Changing sex, then, is also always about changing senses and species in the flesh (Hayward 2008).

In thinking about transwomen in the Tenderloin, I am asking about the role that urban creatures, but even more particularly spiders, might play. Why spiders? Although spiders are not immediately part of the trans-ontologies that I've described, it is that spiders are their own architects, creating resonating places that are home and territory, which guide my reflections on transsexuality. They are partly tropes, but also neighbors, parts of the city. As spiders are syncdochically bound to their webs, a relation of connection and ensemble, they are also materially nested into urban spaces. The figural move between metaphor and syncedoche foregrounds the situated nature of multi-species interaction and reversibilities of proximity. To welcome in the thick description of spiders and their dynamic connections I will discuss, Louise Bourgeois uses the figure of the spider as a symbol of the body in play with place and memory in a sculptural piece, "*Crouching Spider*, located on the outskirts of the Tenderloin". A sculpture, but nonetheless a reminder in its formal composition that experience is also being imaginatively figured as it is literally being figured out. Along with buildings and peoples, spiders also invite us to think about the substance of transitions; the webbing and capacity to weave reminds us that transsexuality is also an expression of the body as an address and habitat. What follows, then, are weavings, entwinings that take trans-becoming, architecture, and species as threading, as yarns for thinking about the constitutive nature of being and sensing. Spiders, streets, and transsexuals are braided, reticulated, netted together in acts of bodily materiality and expressivity.

Spider in the city

On the Embarcadero at Mission Street–Entry Plaza at Pier 14.

First sight: It evokes extreme response; an enormous bronze spider (Figure 1) edging water and land. Neither he nor she, it signifies "it." Uncanny; the size is dwarfing. The legs are spindly, poised on sharp tips; even in their stillness they are lively (Bal 2001; Pollock 2005). Its legs are stretched, as if on the move; motion caught in repose. Is it in its territory? Hunting ground? A metaphor for fear, an emanation of Freud's "phallic mother"? Like its fleshy counterpart with a cuticle of chitin, this spider's exoskeleton protects it. The network of nervous and respiratory systems, the hydraulic forces that make other spiders bumptious, is not



Figure 1. Louise Bourgeois, *Crouching Spider*, 2003. (Bronze, silver nitrate and polished patina, and stainless steel, 106.5" x 329" x 247") (Photograph: Eva Hayward)

visible, but this arthropod's segments, its cephalothorax and abdomen, are enmeshed and knotted with now cooled, metal joins.

Second sight: the shadow of itself is impossible to ignore, even in fog-heavy San Francisco. Balanced on its own silhouette, a spider in a noir-lit web; it is its *web*. Equally difficult to overlook is the setting. Yes, the city, the Tenderloin neighborhood. Yes, the boundary between ocean and earth. But also, from this angle, the Bay Bridge extends it, giving it a capacious reach. Though its spinnerets are encased in bronze, it seems to have spun-out stringy materials. The spider metonymizes, generating zones of correlation and correspondence between object and space; it crawls along the filament of a web made of steel and concrete. It is not an endless reach; all things are not counted equally, though one could go far on these threads. This spider is an urban designer just as it is architectural, a weaver of cityscapes, aggregating parts of the city into its reach, concatenating things, places, and beings. It is no surprise then that Bourgeois herself describes the spider as a "savior" (1999, 178), a liberator.

Third sight: The unfolding scene of Bourgeois's spider stringing out the city recalls Jean-François Lyotard's flaying of the body into what reads like a street map.

Open the so-called body and spread out all its surfaces: not only the skin with each of its folds, wrinkles, scars, with its great velvety planes, and contiguous to that the scalp and its mane of hair, the tender pubic fur, nipples, nails, hard transparent skin under the

heel, the light frills of the eyelids, set with lashes... dilate the diaphragm of the anal sphincter, longitudinally cut and flatten out the black conduit of the rectum, then the colon, then the caecum... armed with scalpels and tweezers, dismantle and lay out the bundles and bodies of the encephalon; and then the whole network of veins and arteries, intact, on an immense mattress, and then the lymphatic network, and the fine bony pieces of the wrist and ankles... (1993, 1)

Lyotard continues: "We must not begin with transgression, we must immediately go to the end of cruelty, construct the anatomy of polymorphous perversion, unfold the immense membrane of the libidinal 'body,' which is quite the inverse of a system of parts" (2). Lyotard's contiguous membrane is indiscriminate, joining diverse elements into perverse intimacies. He suggests that life seeks to conserve substances and extend them into ever growing physical and social configurations. Similarly, the webbing from Bourgeois's spider joins, conjugates, others *with, through, to, by* others – webs matter sensuously and semiotically in terms of prepositions (Potts 1999). Like Lyotard's body, the spider/web foregrounds the inter-corporeal process of taking parts of bodies and things and adhering, coupling them to selves, suggesting the stickiness between embodied subjects and objects, bodies and places. These silken lines reference the skeletalization of surface, the web is an extension of the surface affects of the spider; *it feels with its web*. Likewise, the human body is stretched topographically, places and bodies are put into process, or rather they emerge through a spatial, temporal, corporeal generativity. I am not suggesting that bodies are ruptured or burst open such that they are boundless, but instead, bodies and cities are inter- and intra-threadings, like so many sensuous vectors that run outward from the spider in the middle of its web.

Crouching Spider is part of Bourgeois's *Spider* series, a collection of work that continues her efforts in *Cells* where she explores relationships between women's bodies and architectural spaces such as the house and other domestic spheres (Pollock 1999; Nordal 2007; Lind 2007; Amsellem 2007). Her work is often read as autobiographical with her spiders representing a mother figure, invoking a retreat to memory and dreams. Describing *Cells*, Mieke Bal writes:

Are they sculptures? Installations? Buildings? All and none. Triggers of fantasy and strong statements on art, time, and individual and communal life, Louise Bourgeois' *Cells* fold such categorical denominations of media and genre into one another. From the series, or genre, of works called *Femme Maison*, which explores the relationship between a woman and her house, to the overtly built, *Cells*, the architectural is present in her art. (1999, 103)

Bourgeois's *Spiders* refer to spatial, locational, and situational understandings – a kind of "autotopographical" logic.⁴ Bal resists a purely reiterative interpretation of the works, suggesting that these spiders are not only representations of Bourgeois's autobiography but instead are originating, marking out new expressive encounters between artworks and viewers.

This aspect of Spider – its foregrounding of the body's participation in viewing by way of its destabilization – proposes viewing in an embodied and actualized mode that re-invigorates narrative outside of the hang-up with development, importance, heroism, and individual-masculinist mastery. (Bal 2002, 193)

Similarly, Alex Potts supposes that this work is referential, calling attention to the “vivid psychodynamics of viewing” (1999, 39). Playing with arachnophobic anxieties as well as the childlike delight in alternate scales that immerse the viewer into a different world, these spiders evoke sensation constituted through percepts and affects (Pollock 2005). Bal suggests that the scale of the sculpture invites memories, “spinning the stories that allow the spider to grow big enough to be a building” (1999, 104). The dynamic between self and space that *Crouching Spider* calls to mind also stirs the *sense of self* – vectors of longing reanimate the place of contact but so do material refrains and constraints.

As Bal says, “On all levels of visuality (and that is where the ‘unthought known’ resides), Bourgeois’s work categorically rejects these dichotomies: between mind and body, abstraction and figuration, visuality and tactility, flatness and volume, time and space” (2002, 192). Entangled selves linked through sensuous encounters, and each prepositional thread – that which bonds others to each other – carries a particular resonance. *Crouching Spider* as a piece of habitat, a synecdoche of the city, it is always topographical. The spider articulates, as in phrased, and joined through acts of *articulus* and prepositional modes, the centrifugal and centripetal spinning of a carnal city.

Arachnosexuality

Arachne, the weaver, reveals the sexual transgressions of the gods transfigured into animals in her tapestry: Zeus (as a swan) with Leda, (as a white bull) with Europa, Poison (as a bull) with Arne. Offending the gods, Arachne is transformed from human to spider. Jan Dunning (Figure 2) depict her transmogrification: limbs emerging and body arching. About metamorphosis, Dunning says:

Limbs, tails, feathers and flesh tangle before our eyes over the course of one long exposure, so that the viewer is unable to decipher where a body begins or ends, where it separates or entwines with its natural surroundings, and whether the species itself is human, plant, animal or some combination thereof. But rather than diminishing the creature’s physical power, its unresolved form becomes an expression of creativity and potential. (n.d.)

A spinner of heavenly bestiality, Arachne melds species boundaries, but also transgresses nature and culture through a technological out-doing of the sacred. Arachne is a spiderwoman, but also a trans-woman.

Guided by Arachne and Louise Bourgeois’s sculptural exploration of home, embodiment, sexuality, and place, what can be said about spiders and trans-becomings? Trans-etiologies? Trans-phyla? Henri Lefebvre describes spiderliness: “It produces, it secretes and it occupies a space which it engenders according to its own lights: the space of its web, of its stratagems, of its needs” (1991, 173). He continues, “Here the production of space, beginning with the production of the body, extends to the productive secretion of a ‘residence’ which also serves as a tool, a means” (173). The web emerges through the spider’s sensuous milieu; it builds with the world through the aperture of its sensorium. “Thus the spider, for all its



Figure 2. *Arachne*, 2003, by Jan Dunning. (Color pinhole photograph, 49" × 38" [124 cm 96 cm]). Source: <http://www.jandunning.com/statement.html>

'lowness,' is already capable, just like human groups, of demarcating space and orienting itself, creating networks on the basis of angles. It can create networks and links, symmetries and asymmetries" (173). Through these "spatial indicators" of self, the spider is always a "body facing another body" (174).

Giorgio Agamben reads Jakob von Uexküll's work on *Umwelt* to propose that spider "environment-worlds" may not be our own, may not share perceptual similarity, but are overlapping and linked as if by a "gigantic musical score" (2004, 39–41). In our shared capacities to sense the world, our senses form synchronicities or unities that are not ontological formations, but become in tune "almost like two notes of the 'keyboard on which nature performs the supratemporal and extraspatial symphony of signification'" (41). This distributed synchronicity creates superimpositions of "carriers of significance" (that which constitutes a being's relationship with an environment) through which senses offer the sensation of reciprocity such that encounters might seem "web-like." Energetic forces, coextensive overlappings, shared milieus make species; species are sensuous responses. The OED tells us that a species is an "emission or emanation from outward things"; species are sensations. Rather than bodies as direct products of environments, an organism's responsiveness with an environment is the conditions of its emergence. The organism is a transitional response to its sensorial limits, which are always an incitement rather than a determinant; that is to say, through its corporeal and sensorial capacities it attempts to coordinate with its own specified environment (Hayward forthcoming).

How might transsexuality be a creative response? Sensational? An expression of bodily and species capacities? By putting two disparate elements at play, transsexuals and spiders, my intention is not to bracket out more semiotic or sociological readings of gender or sex, but to counter the tendency of seeing transsexuals as purely manifestations of discourse. For instance, Elizabeth Grosz writes:

Men, contrary to the fantasy of the transsexual, can never, even with surgical intervention, feel or experience what it is like to be, to live, as women. At best the transsexual can live out his fantasy of femininity – a fantasy that in itself is usually disappointed with the rather crude transformations effected by surgical and chemical intervention. (1994, 207)

Grosz reduces sex changing to an illusionary production of embodiment such that altering one's sex is a psychotic condition that exists in contradiction to the constraints of perceptual reality. Mtf (her target here) remain trapped in a scene of becoming, which is unrooted from more earthly substrates. Her use of disappointment is peculiar. Who is disappointed? Is she? "Crude transformations" implies the primacy of aesthetics in transitioning over more proprioceptive formations. Might it be that a transsexual woman becomes a woman for reasons other than simply being read as a woman?

It is unclear what evidence Grosz uses to substantiate her claims about transsexuality: no citations, no discussion about the global variations of mtf identifications (ie. hijras, *fa'fafines*, *nádleehí*), nor any specific engagements with transsexual self-narratives. Her reading of transsexuality begs the question, what is at stake in transsexuality that allows Grosz to presume an insider's view? Grosz's pronoun choice refuses the transsexuals difference, elides possibility and already assumes that sex is a done category, but from the position of self-certainty. Does she know more about the embodied experience of transsexuals than we can know about ourselves? Surprisingly, in this move, Grossz counters her own arguments about the centrality of bodily knowledge for the formation of subjectivity, reinstating an outmoded model for transcending the limits of the body to do interpretive work (Salamon 2010).

In another instance, exploring the embodiment and virtual space, Grosz targets Allucquère Stone (aka Sandy Stone) in suggesting that Stone:

[F]inds the allure of cyberspace precisely that of transsexualism: the capacity of a supervening subject or mind to chose its body and modes of materiality, claiming experience of multiple subject positions even while appearing to acknowledge the inherent belonging together of any mind in and as a body. (2001, 83)

Interestingly, Grosz references only one essay by Stone in which Stone does not disclose her transsexuality or make links between sex-change and virtual embodiments (Stone 1992). Again, how are these inferences informed? Because elsewhere, "Empire strikes back: A posttranssexual manifesto" (1991), Stone is quite clear that transsexual women are constituted through layered histories, which are anything but dematerializing. Indeed, what made Stone's manifesto so powerful, so inventive was precisely its instance on imagining alternative subjectivities for transsexuals, what she called "post-transsexuals," rather than shuttling across situated positions or differences. Stone critiques the ways transsexuality must conform to narratives of

conversion, of lost history in order that transsexuals might receive assistance, help, and care. Of course, there are counter narratives here about the desire for passing, for finally being sexed or “at home in the body,” but this is not Stone’s project (Prosser 1998). For Stone, establishments that administrate transsexuality “foreclose the possibility of a life grounded in the intertextual possibilities of the transsexual body.” Grosz appears to muddle Stone’s arguments in order to caste Stone as a figure of transcendental subjectivity that indiscriminately occupies multiple positionalities, again, like Baudrillard and Braidotti, embodying a masculinist fantasy of disembodiment.

The ambivalence that Grosz is registering in her pronouncements on transsexuality seems to point to a more general anxiety about how sex changing puts into crisis sexual difference (Prosser 1998). Much could be said about this taxonomic trouble, and much has been, but I want to proffer that the representational emphasis on *being woman* for mtfs tends to limit other orderings of meaning and materiality at work in transitioning, trans-sexing (cf. Stryker and Whittle 2008). These ontological battles over who is a woman or not foreclose – partly because of the pain they cause – discussions about the fullness or more-ness of the transitioning body.

Might it be that the trans-body itself is expressive? A transsexual lives out the responsive potential of the flesh; through sensuous reaches, intensifications of corporeal boundaries and energetic states, the body becomes simply more. In Myra Hird’s essay, “Animal transex” (2006), she invites us to think about transsexuality in relation to sex changing in other species. Working from a “new materialism” that finds “agency and contingency within the living and non-living world” (37), Hird advances that an attention to bio-materiality and bio-mimicry might redefine debates about transsexuality. Eschewing a nature/culture distinction, she offers that, “trans exists in non-human species” (37). Though differently refracted through speciated milieus, sex changing can be accounted for by the organism’s *reading* of changes in the environment.

Taking over from David Policansky’s (1982) findings on sex changing in plants and animals, Hird enumerates a vast array of organisms such as fishes, marine snails, worms, and insects that change their sex in relation to environmental pressures, reproductive potential, or even the vagaries of taste. Not to propose that human transsexuals change for the same reasons, obviously the technologies of transitioning are at different scales and refrains, but that the enactment of sex change is in some way a bodily engagement with the world. It is the constitution of a relational milieu, an in-between site through which conductivities and energies form bodiliness, and expressiveness or responsiveness, the excitation of transfers, is what is at stake in species and sexual orders. Sexual differences (not sexual difference) remain unfinished; sexual ontologies stay active, ongoing, differentiating. If sexual differences and sexuality are exuberances (Pavelka 1995; Bagemihl 1999; Hird 2004; Roughgarden 2004), contingencies, then sex is profuse, a superabundant happening.

We might extend these trans-sex dynamics to understand how energetic forces are a making of something *more*. For instance, the excess of sexual selection could be articulated as the expressive over-spilling of sensoriums, a passionate rapport that

advances a creature's further transformation. In the words of Richard Doyle (2007), "sexual selection excels at the momentary breakdown of inside/outside topologies" and thereby generates "not fitness but entanglement" (80). Sexuality, as such, is a drive for promulgation, and sexualities vary with no preferred form, no inherent hierarchies. Doyle continues, "Darwin's intense and exquisite study of the mechanisms of sexual selection...continually focused on tactics for inducing the dissolution of boundaries, a sudden fluctuation of figure and ground" (2007, 79). Doyle understands that the expenditure of surplus liveliness is bumptious, fabulous, *Unheimlich*.

Relational formations, sex and species are also partly the ardor of their constitutional impacts, the affections of their materiality. Through selectivity, sex and species categories are contingent, yolk; this is not an engulfing of difference but an opening toward possibility. Natural, artificial, and sexual selections are no more done with transsexuals than with what it means to be a spider. Bodily expressions (i.e., transsexual transitions and spider weavings) emerge as intensive maps, values composed of transverse orientations toward a shared world. This is about the transfer of sensation as a mode of manifesting rather than simply encounters are materializing, it is the transfer of forces and energies that make bodies. Trans-phyla exchanges of affects work to weave bodies together; that is to say, through a crossing of sensations, bodies emerge, building out milieus, domains.

Intimate threads

I envision my body as a meeting point, a node, where external lines of force and social determination thicken into meat and circulate as movement back into the world. So much that constitutes me I did not choose, but, now constituted, I feel myself in a place of agency. – Susan Stryker (2008, 42)

In her essay, "Dungeon Intimacies: The Poetics of Transsexual Sadomasochism" (2008), Susan Stryker stitches together bodies, places, and histories. For Stryker, carnal improvisations, pulses, resonances, rhythms "thicken into meat" and bruised tributaries only to flow back out of this subjective reservoir and into political projects and critical interventions. She writes:

The physical landscape is made of memories...I see the place by the abandoned steel foundry where Texas Tomboy and Monika Treut filmed some scenes for *Gendernauts*...I see the live-work lofts near the Bay Bridge where Ian and I once watched Raelyn pierce and cut Cathy Opie for one of her bloody self-portraits. (36)

From her vantage the cityscape is crisscrossed with *pastpresents* (an always present past in the present) such that engaging the space around her is dimensionally extended by "observations into the patterns longer than...lived experience" (37). History is entanglement, knotting, a game of cat's cradle that maps impressions and corporealities through libidinal tracings, erotogenic intensities, and psychical cartographies. The central trope for her telling is "porosity" as poesis. "Transsexual sadomasochism in dungeon space enacts a *poiesis* (an act of artistic creation) that collapses the boundary between the embodied self, its world, and

others, allowing one to interpenetrate the others and thereby constitute a specific place” (39). Divides between subjects and objects, selves and others, are ruptured, distorted, generating new subjective configurations, but only through the constraints of an impassioned embodiment. Stryker risks corporeal integrities – skins welt, shoulders empurple, wrists chafe – to explore the inherent openness or pliability of the body.

I invent new choreographies of space and time as I dance my whip across the creature’s ass. It is not that I somehow internalize as my own the structure or content of the scene in which I participate, receiving its impression the way clay would receive a sculptor’s mark. It is rather a proprioceptive awareness, as I flog, of the role of my body as medium in the circuit of transmissions, and of the material efficacy I possess in my subjective ability to choose one thing rather than another or to poetically imagine the shape of a new pattern. (42)

Just as Stryker recounts her webbed visions of San Francisco places, so her “autoethnographic” (38) accounts of living matter in motion are themselves manifestations of dynamic becoming: the scene of the city cuts through Stryker’s body by her acts of “reciprocal vulnerability” (43). Guided by the phenomenological investigations of Henri Bergson ([1896] 2002) and Gaston Bachelard (1958), the erotic force of sadomasochism interpenetrates Stryker’s city as her body becomes a kinetic site. Desirous enactments of power and its loss, as Stryker proposes, are “continuous movement in which a force’s vector is prolonged and deflected into the movements of living matter”; so too, I want to suggest, is becoming trans (42).

The transitional self can never risk disembodyment or autogenesis; it is a sensuous self made such only through the refrain of its sensorium. Senses and their subtending registers are reactive to the sensual abundance of the world, but limited by a perceptual milieu (i.e. eyes see only so much, ears hear only a fraction of the sounded-out information in an environment). The movement of the sensuous across the perceptual registers creates *texture*, which propagates embodiment through the excitation of contingencies and intimacies, leaving marks and traces (Hayward forthcoming). The passing of sensation through and between perceptual and affective apertures creates remainders of filterings that result in expressiveness. Texture is the unmetabolizable *more*, the residue of passing, of animate forces moving across bodies and objects. The transitional body is a textural body, generating contractions of the sensorium through the bio-refractions of hormones, etc.

I offer “transpositions” to name the spatial-sensual-temporal processes that mark such trans-sex transitions. But a reminder: it is impossible anymore, if even it ever was, to categorically define the ways that transsexuals become trans-sexed. Indeed, attempts to definitively name, chart, frame all the matrices of trans-becoming, as we’ve seen with Grosz, are often the greatest injustices committed against transsexuals (Millot 1990; Raymond 1994; Hausman 1995; Bailey 2003; Jeffreys 2002). So, I contend that transpositions are a very particular, situated articulation of trans-becoming oriented by spatial and temporal forces with which transsexuals sensuously undertake these variable enactments of morphing embodiment.

To transpose is an act of changing something into another form, or to transfer to a different place or context: transmutations but also translations, alterations in

modes of expression. Transposes can as well be perversions or deviations, misdirections that discompose order and arrangement. There is something musical or rhythmic about transpositions, a fiddling with tone, pulse, pacing. And, I can't help but also hear in this etymological ensemble, "transposons," the jumping of chromosomal material within the genome of a single-cell, cut-and-paste movements that generate mutations, what Barbara McClintock famously called "jumping genes" (1950). Transpositions are poetic joins or trans-forms in which there is some transposing, some mixing at work that produces texture, not just bodies touching, but the provocation of those joins. The incitement of bodily boundaries is manifested in the iterative and sensuous connectivity through which the limits between self and environment are activated (Lingis 2000; Grosz 2001; Pallasmaa 2005). Transpositions say nothing about "why" transsexuals, particularly mtfs, transition or who we become through those transitions – even as a trans-person, I find it difficult to categorically explain, "Why am I a transsexual?" (Regardless of the enumerable requests for me to do so). I suspect that as the structures of most ontologies remain evolving and relational, so too are trans-ontologies. This is not an act of failed self-reflection; rather, it is simply part of the foundations of beingness, of otherness that holds bodies in processes of differential, though constitutive, materialization.

To illustrate the spatial-sensual-temporal qualities of transposition I offer an example I've written elsewhere about sex reassignment surgery.

The cut is possibility. For some transsexual women, the cut is not so much an opening of the body, but a generative effort to *pull the body back through itself* in order to feel mending, to feel the growth of new margins. The cut is not just an action; the cut is part of the ongoing materialization by which a transsexual tentatively and mutably becomes. The cut cuts the meat (not primarily a visual operation for the embodied subject, but rather a proprioceptive one), and a space of psychical possibility is thereby created. From the first, a transsexual woman embodiment does not necessarily foreground a wish to "look like" or "look more like a woman" (i.e. passing) – though for some transwomen this may indeed be a wish (fulfilled or not). The point of view of the looker (those who might "read" her) is not the most important feature of trans-subjectivity – the trans-woman wishes to be *of* her body, to "speak" from her body. (2008, 72)⁵

This kind of trans-becoming considers how the transsexual emerges through the body's own viscosity, through the energization of corporeal limits. The trans-body is a matrix through which sensations may be drawn back through the body, to make the body familiar. The affair between the felt-body and the lived-body is also enacted through habitation, the ecosystem of which the self is part. The trans-body, as Lyotard describes of the general body, is threaded through itself, just as it's webbed with its neighborhood. That which prompts a trans-woman to transition is also more than her transition, and her transition can only ever be understood as the tip of the iceberg. Her transition does not make her a woman for she is always already un-male/not-man, but it allows her to feel at "home" as a woman, a gendered neighbor, a historical subject (Prosser 1998). A transitioning woman is enfleshing, enfolding elements of her environment within herself and expressing parts of herself back into the environment as part of her transition. The environment, populated with

inorganic and organic beings, houses her while she contributes, in real time, to building it. This process serves as the conditions of possibility of the constitutive activities of sensing and living, and as a generative energy in iterative or “moreover” manifestations. She is a spider in her web, or, more precisely, she is becoming *with* her web, her trap.

From a spider woman

From her phenomenological experiences of the dungeon, Stryker gives me the method of “auto-ethnography.” She asks how one’s “experiences can offer evidence for more widely applicable statements about the relationship between embodied subject and material environment” (2008, 38–9). The “personal,” then is not the same as the “individual” but an opportunity to see how embodied experience is the basis for study of more generalizable forms. By redeploying the legacy of transsexuals self-narrating, to construct a cohesive narrative around wrong bodyness so that they can be witnessed, supported, treated, Stryker uses her carnal knowledge of trans-subjectivity to reach back into larger political, historical, and cultural currents. Rather than interpreting such reflexivity as navel-gazing as a failure of critical distance, I want to follow Stryker’s lead and use autoethnography to elaborate my discussions of sensations, transpositions, and trans-phyla emergences.⁶

Here are a series of transpositions as disclosures accompanied by Kira O'Reilly's *Fingerweb* photograph (Figure 3). O'Reilly's experiments investigate the interconnections of the haptic and the visual, skin and web. Her cross-threading and cross-weaving of senses and species invokes my own neologism “fingeryeyes,” created,

[T]o articulate the in-between of encounter, a space of movement, of potential: this haptic-optic defines the overlay of sensoriums and the inter- and intrachange of sensations. Fingeryeyes... is the transfer of intensity, of expressivity in the simultaneity of touching and feeling. (Hayward forthcoming)

My transpositions might appear as drifts of recollection – as in “my story” – but they are meant to suggest, however tentatively or sparkly, the sensuous transactions between body and environment. The identity of city places are eminently variable and assume diverse forms, just as “transitioning” remains mobile and fluid through the vicissitudes of self much the way O'Reilly's webbing joins surfaces and textures.

Tenderloin – Rhetorical allusions to the loin, meat, and soft underbelly.

My home: 1028 Post Street. A small studio. A claw-footed bathtub. One view of the neighboring, brick building. Pigeons coo outside.

I am here to “tender loins,” to trans-sex. I am not sure why this neighborhood, but it seems like a return, a need. An act of inverted diaspora?

A territory already made by the labors, deaths, and loves of other trans-women?

I live directly across from “Diva’s.” Standing outside the bar at all hours, these women are dazzling. They gather at the entry, which recedes from the sidewalk just enough to have shelter and vantage. Their excess, exuberance is framed by concrete and steel.

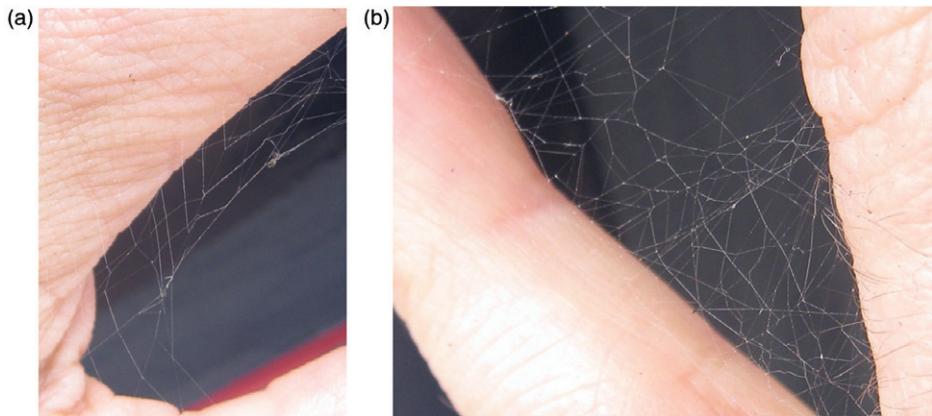


Figure 3. Kira O'Reilly, *Fingerweb* series (2009) (Photographic studies. (Dimensions variable.) (Permission of artist.)

Transwomen histories flesh-out the Tenderloin: the legendary female impersonator Rae Bourbon, a performer during the Pansy Craze, was arrested in 1933 while his show Boys Will Be Girls at Tait's Cafe at 44 Ellis Street was being broadcast on the radio; in 1966, predating Stonewall, trans-women rioted at Crompton's Cafeteria at Turk and Taylor in protest of police harassment.

Some days I try to distinguish myself from other women working the streets by reading and walking, using codes to shield myself from approach. I fold myself inward and lower my vision into my feet, my feet "look out" for me. My toes begin to apprehend the crosswalks differently, collaborating. Often it works, but occasionally men slow their cars anyway and signal me for a paid tryst. Depending, I pretend not to notice.

Here in my home, I am freshly aware that my body is a threshold, a door frame between rooms, the way the molding on the ceiling delimits zones of texture while spiders build silken tangles across them. It is not as simple as to say that I am crossing from "man" to "woman." I'm not sure I know what such a claim would mean for me. But, on a scalpel of desire along a hormonal surge I am crossing the matter of my body on a bridge of sensation. As my body becomes legibly "woman," a white woman, I am aware that the limits of my body are also the energized zones of relation. I stay at the threshold, while actively crossing that very threshold; I am caught, and willingly staying, in a state of re-articulation as I make myself intelligible enough.

Public Transit – I am pushed through concrete veins and steal arteries, along funiculars and elevators. In the hurl of conveyance, I hold my body in positions that signify my desire to "pass." But less obviously, estrogens have begun to refigure my olfactory nerves. I'm smelling layers of place, registering different saturations of funk and perfume (Moore, Wisniewski, and Dobs 2003). The interior of the train thickens with miasmic genealogy, and my transing senses variably make sense of it. I move and am moved by and through passageways, what Bernard Cache calls spaces of "transistance," inflected so much so that

inside and outside become devoid of meaning (1995, 14). I only apprehend the rudiments of spatial order as they are transformed – the city and I fold and unfold one another through our shared sensuality (39).

Moving under the city, the train vectors its way toward my endocrinologist and esthetician so that I may undergo something like a second puberty.⁷

My body is morphed by a daily dose of 8.5 mg of Premarin, 300 mg of Spironolactone, and regular treatments of laser hair removal. Under the play of bodily forces, my face, breasts, hips, genitals, arms, legs, stomach, and shoulders become zones of grumblings, feelings, heavings, pleasures, leakings, and desires. I try scrubbing out the brunt hair follicles on my face and elsewhere from laser hair removal before they grow inflamed and leave darkened spots. Fat deposits uproot and travel to new sights of colonization: hips widen, breasts grow (and secrete fluid, lactate!), face changes from oval to heart-shaped, and musculature softens and dissolves.

The sole witness, I spend hours before the refracting reflection of my transmutating body, tending the sensations, newnesses, and curves that I am becoming, manifesting, experiencing. I give my life over to these changes. They exceed beyond what I might have desired. They are unpredictable; they are their own agents (Kirk 1999). Carefully and deliberately I emerge as a transsexual self: my transitioning body and I find, tenderly, a new kind of accommodation, negotiating each other. We create an in-between-ness, a state of process, invention, and sensuous reconstruction.

After my ordeal with the laser – the post-procedural feel of stung-singed-numbness always reminds me of Blake's "Tiger, tiger, burning bright." I stop by "Olive" (743 Larkin Street). In the windowless lounge, I feel like Alice descending into the rabbit hole, passing from the brightness of "not-passing" (so many staring eyes) to the dim shadows of possibility, of inexpressible hope. As the curvature of my lenses changes through estrogen sensitivity my vision brackets and shuttles between planes of focused activity, so that the variations of shadow in this bar are like scrims, opening up scenes as my eyes shift in their socket (Leach and Wallace 1971; Krenzer and Dana 2000). I know these perceptual alterations will be assimilated into a bodily norm soon – the body aims for habituation – but in this newness of sensation I delight in how my body feels this familiar place afresh, restored of receivable sensory richness.

Exit Theater (156 Eddy Street).

Veronica Klaus performs her one-woman show "Family Jewels."

People ask me if I feel like a woman . . . Do I feel like a woman? The truth is, I have no idea whether I feel like any other woman. I have no idea whether I ever felt like any other man. All I know is that I feel like me, Veronica. This person whose existence is partly innate, partly instinct, partly art, the art of creating . . . But I do find as I go through life I become more comfortable asking myself questions like "Who am I?"

Might transsexuality be artfulness? If Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari read art as not necessarily about aesthetics, but about sensation, about the expressive

potential of “cosmological forces” (1994), do also the trans-working of flesh, organs, and muscle into new modes of potentiality? Art in verb form is an urge, an incitement, and an induction. By this, I mean something quite serious, not some frivolity of creativity, but art as becoming, of intensifying bodily substance, to resonate. Transsexual embodiment is a provocation to live-out, to feel different carnal zones of metamorphosis, transition, and intervention. But provocations are responses and reactions to our capacities to be harmonized (to greater or lesser degrees) with environments, habitats, and spaces.

Who are my allies in the dance of trans-becoming, transpositioning: Fog? Concrete? Crows? Pigeons? Cockroaches? Noise? The living foam of the Tenderloin, from Glide Memorial Church (330 Ellis Street) to Foot Worship (1214 Sutter Street) and Bale (511 Jones Street), is populated by all of these and more, interdigitating flesh with the knot of streets.

Lefebvre notes that early in the genesis of a biological organism:

[A]n indentation forms in the cellular mass. A cavity gradually takes place.... The cells adjacent to the cavity form a screen or membrane, which serves as a boundary.... A closure thus comes to separate within from without so establishing the living being as a “distinct body.” (1991, 175)

He continues:

The membranes in question remain permeable, punctured by pores and orifices. Traffic back and forth, so far from stopping, tends to increase and become more differentiated, embracing both energy exchange (alimentation, respiration, excretion) and information exchange (the sensory apparatus). (176)

My body is still my body, but hormones initiate radical relays of transformed bodiliness. I start to wonder if my “conjugated equine estrogens” are reshaping my species – becoming horse – along with my sex. Could mare chemistry be interlacing my own, giving me more of an insight into horse perception than sex perception? I am sure there are no horses in the Tenderloin (although certainly pony/horse play is taking place somewhere in the neighborhood), but as elements of mare urine coarse through my flesh I am sensitized to how animals and other non-humans are everywhere in the city.

The shadows of streets not only offer a reprieve from the voyeuristic drive of surveillance, but also harbor other lives such as molds, mites, silverfish, and rats that crisscross and cross-hatch socio-economic-political urban divides. Through their reaching, feeding, and reproducing, they help constitute the city, its design, and its fear that the outside will come inside (Ingraham 2006).

How many transwomen on Post, Larkin, Geary, Jones, O’Farrell, Sutter, Turk, and Taylor are mixing species in their own bodies? How many of us are engaged in some kind of symbiogenetic, transspecies becoming? Transwomen have so often been imagined as porous – the threat of psychosis subtending the transsexual “diagnosis” – literally a sex in pieces. And now I wonder, in this neighborhood, the sphere that my body inhabits, the sphere of the imagination, are our trans-bodies part of the necessary (life’s own inventiveness, artfulness;

bio-engined investments in variation and potential) knotting of city-selves, a concrescence of contiguity and difference. Could this be trans-becoming?

Of webs and healwounds

A spider, in the corner of my studio, by the window, sits and sits. She is an “American house spider,” *Archaeearanea tepidariorum*.⁸ Her legs are white, and cephalothorax is brown dusted with black. For now she is alone in her web. She will only live for a little more than a year. If she produces eggs, the spiderlings will float away on their own glossy lines (“ballooning”). She stays for what seems like days at the center of her web, her touch-world while the web seems to trap only dust. And then, as if called from across the room, she moves and quickly, even uncannily: there/then not, still/in motion, unsettling/reassuring. And just like that, this little, air-breathing, chelicerate arthropod, with two body segments, a set of fangs, four pairs of eyes, eight legs, and pairs of movable spinnerets leaves behind a cobweb. Even now after the silvery threads have come to look like unspooled, wooly yarn, the web remains a join between vision and touch, between angles and planes, without her as the perceiving center. The web is an optic skin, a connective tissue, building a home that senses in order that the spider might feed, entrap, and make more of herself.

David Quammen counsels that we cannot easily identify with spiders, at best we are curious and at worse we are disturbed, but we do find kinship with this spider building its home in our home while we are doing the same (1988). It is this abjected nearness that Nina Katchadourian engages in her “Mended Spiderweb” series (Figure 4). With red thread, Katchadourian repairs torn webbing, mixing media to create cross-species rejoinders. Rarely do the spiders except her interventions, cutting out and discarding her efforts with new silks. The project is a reminder of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s worry about addressing language problems through language: “We feel as if we had to repair a torn spider’s web with our fingers” (2001, 39). But there is something about artfulness, inventiveness of the mended webs that speaks to collective forms of movement, animation, and percussion. The failure of collaboration here doesn’t null the energetic interactions of these species. Error is still expression, an intensity that is touched and engaged by human and spider. Spiders build out their worlds, and Katchadourian tunes her art practice to approximate the frequency of spiders’ efforts. Her red-threaded webs do not look like the spiders’, but the capacity to create – to syncopate, to improvise – seems a shared reactivity between spiders and peoples. As Alphonso Lingis reminds us, humans are composites of zoo-intensities, animated movements, bio-differentials, making our experience of agency, sexuality, subjectivity less about individuated forms and more about distribution, collection, variation (2000). He asks, “Is not the force of our emotions that of other animals?” (36).

A photograph of a transwoman. On her back is drawn a street map of the Tenderloin. I don’t know who took the photograph; but it is affiliated with “Personal Geographies” exhibition (2003). The grid of streets is inked onto her skin, appearing as marks, sutures, and impressions. Skin, not unlike webbing, is nerved

with touch, translating tactility into response, binding self with the world: silken vectors and concrescent nodes energetically distributed and corporeally held. The weight of this neighborhood is literally on her back; networked, webbed, she is of these streets just as these streets impinge on her. Charlotte in her web? Announcing her home, her habitat through her own skin, she is a spinster, spinning-out the maze of streets through her body, her flesh. And like Katchadourian's web repairs, a transwoman invents and improvises, sometimes feeling the irrepressible limits of human form. But in contrast to Grosz's description of trans-embodiment as "disappointment" or "crudeness," a transsexual becomes energetically more through the tissuey and juicy substance of her body, which is not about aesthetics but about intensity, becoming lively. "Errors" (which can be felt as "non-passing") may occur, but even that occurrence is an enactment of possibility, of future states that we may yet become.

To further illustrate, and conclude, I want to foreground the figure of the "trap" for transsexuals and spiders. First, for transsexuals, rather than emphasizing the element of "wrong-bodiness" in the now familiar trope, "trapped in the wrong body," what if we highlighted the question of the "trap." Trapped can describe the embodied quality of felt disembodiment – the horrifying experience of dysmorphia. But, trap may also refer to being trapped by a cultural insistence in sexual oppositions and hierarchies (Prosser 1998). And yet, trap is also a mouth, a mode of utterance, the "O" curve of lips and throat that make sounds phonic and name the apprehension of being embodied (Salvaggio 1999). In weaving, a trap is a break in the threads of a warp, an unraveling, loosening, unwinding that opens a space in a tapestry. To be trapped in a wrong body, then, must also account for these questions of articulation, articulating oneself into culture and history, but also creating a site, a gap, making room in cultural and political fabrications. In this way, entrapment is always also about doors, alternative passageways, surprises, and thresholds. To be trapped in the body, then, is possibility rather than only confinement, trapped is about building-out, un-knotting so as to re-knot the territory of embodied self, to speak and receive ranges of sensuous input from one's environment (Prosser 1998; Hayward 2008).

Similarly, the spider's web is a trap, a silk net, a sticky mesh. Created from proteinaceous fibers that are surprisingly light and yet have remarkable tensile strength, this trap is made from the spider; it is an expression of its bodily capacity (Oliver 1999; Rosen 2004). The web is a musical improvisation between the spider and its prey, but also between itself and its environment (Agamben 2004). The web is an expressive extension, a rhythmic prosthesis that defines the limits of spidery sensoriums. As such, webs are predacious selves, augmented parts of the spider and its territory – so entrapment, but also home and habitat as well as resource and reach. In the speculative spirit of trans-phyla descriptions, it is this sort of trapping that is at work in the experience of transsexual bodily entrapment that I have described. The transitioning body is also a gossamer outstretch of homeliness, energetic force or potential, a discursive pulse, a throb of sensations distributed across sensoriums, spaces, and times, delimiting territory but also sensing zones, places, and coherences.

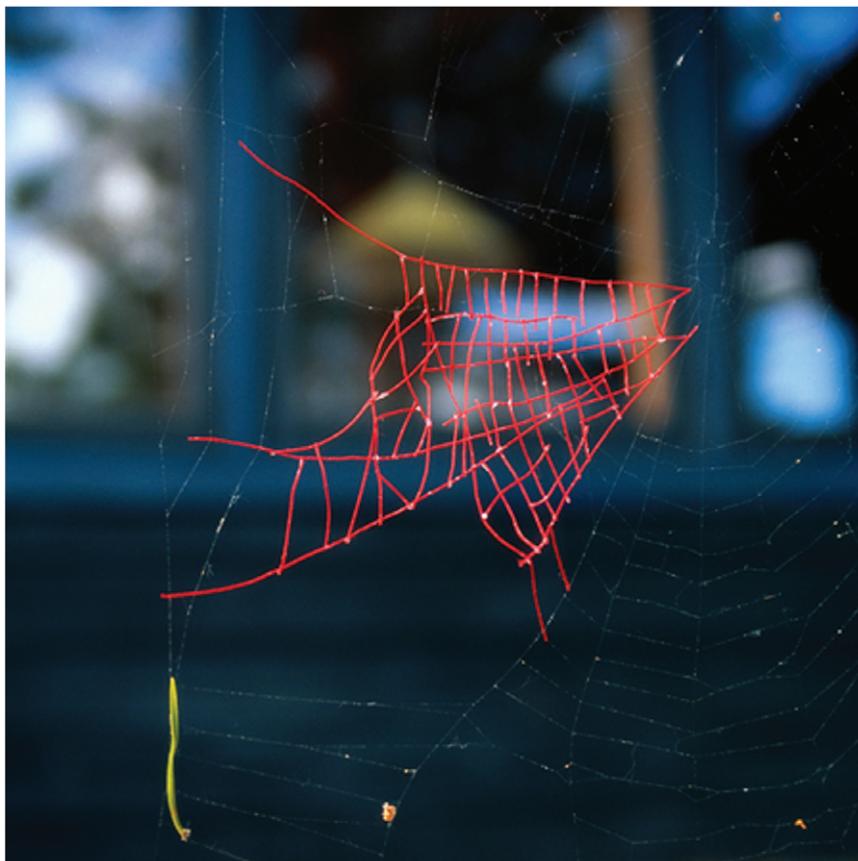


Figure 4. Nina Katchadourian, *Mended Spiderweb 8* (1998) (Cibachrome, 20" x 20"). Courtesy of the artist, Sara Meltzer gallery and Catharine Clark gallery.

Transitioning is vibratory; transitioning women are, first and most importantly, vibratory beings. She is a creative response between sensation and environment, and for those who start the percussion with Premarin, this responsiveness begins with animals (even, unfortunately, their instrumentalization). Unavoidably, non-human substances are unleashed into her body, transforming and altering. Through the sexually differentiating forces of horses, the transwoman's body is made emphatically more. And through the provocation of the senses, bodies become threaded through themselves in the act of changing their forms, architectures, ecosystems – an act manifested from drives materialized into exterior potentialities. We move with the world through the sleeve of senses (touch, sight, smell, taste) – sensitization of the surface. Interiority can only be understood, then, as an sensuous exteriority drawn within the membrane of "self." As Lefebvre writes that space is "first of all my body, and then it is my body counterpart or 'other,' its mirror-image or shadow: it is the



Figure 5. Wonderland exhibition. Personal Geographies. Photograph by Dave Golden, "Map", 2009. October 17–November 15. <http://www.wonderlandshow.org/index.html>. Visited July 2010.

shifting intersection between that which touches, penetrates, threatens or benefits my body on the one hand, and all other bodies on the other" (1991, 184). And as spiders and their webs and transsexual embodiments are being iteratively reconfigured, so too are insides and outsides generating and breaching their constitutive boundaries – threads hold together more or less conditionally until they are eaten by the spider who spun them, or swept away in a cleaning frenzy, or reworked after having caught a meal, or simply abandoned for another site.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Katie King, Susan Stryker, Julian Carter, and Lindsay Kelley for reading early drafts of this essay. Their editorial guidance and advice helped to shape the best parts of this essay. I also want to thank Jennifer Griggs who helped me co-organize a panel on Trans-architecture at the Translating Identities Conference, University of Vermont, 2008, where I

first shared this essay. A significantly different version of this essay entitled ‘Spiderwoman: Notes on Transpositions’ will appear in *Transgender Migrations: The Bodies, Borders and Politics of Transition*. Trystan Cotton, ed. New York: Routledge Press, 2011.

Notes on contributor

Eva Hayward is a postdoctoral fellow in Women’s Studies at Duke University, and Assistant Professor in the Department of Cinematic Arts and Interdisciplinary Film and Digital Media Program at the University of New Mexico. She has lectured and published widely on animal studies, experimental film, and queer embodiment. Her recently published essays, “More lessons from a starfish: Prefixial flesh and transspecies selves” and “FingeryEyes: Impressions of cup corals,” explore the sensuality of encounters between species and senses.

Notes

1. Braidotti and Baudrillard are not alone in their pronouncements or use of transsexuality in the service of interpretation. Their work seems to imply that the transsexual is good to think with without transsexuals as lived subjectivities. The ethical problems of this interpretive move are difficult to ignore, but it does point to the way the transsexual, as Susan Stryker proffered, “is the golem” in service of postmodernity, continental philosophy, and sexual difference feminisms (2006).
2. I’ve explored the connections between transsexuality and animality in the paintings of Erica Rutherford in a paper presented at the College Arts Association, Chicago, 2010. “Cut sex animal; Or, trans-species becoming in the paintings of Erica Rutherford.” Offering a non-biographical, but bodily, engagement with transsexuality and art, I suggest that Rutherford evokes the body as frame, the unleashing of bodily energies through the painting, and multispecies register of hormonal/surgical transitioning in the formal elements of the paintings. See Rutherford’s (1993) autobiography for more about her artwork.
3. To be clear, I do not advocate the use of Premarin. The living-conditions of horses used in collecting urine raise serious ethical questions. Horses are impregnated, kept in small enclosures unable to turn around while rubber sacks are attached to hold their urine. Horses are given small amounts of water to get higher concentrations of estrogen. It has become more common for endocrinologist to put transwomen on plant-based hormonal replacement therapy. I am currently working on an essay, “Soy-sexual,” which explores the phenomenology of becoming-soy for transsexual women.
4. Bal uses Jennifer González’s neologism “autotopography” to articulate a spatial form of art-writing with regard to Bourgeois’s sculptures and installations. González created the term to refer to personal objects – such as photos, tourist memorabilia, etc.– that are arranged by a subject as material signs that represent that self-identity. See “Autotopographies” (González 1995).
5. I want to acknowledge my debt to Karen Barad. Her work on brittlestars and diffractions helped me think through my own questions about differential becoming and prepositional knowledge. At the 2004 annual SLSA conference, I presented a paper, “Jellyfish Optics: Immersion in MarineTechnoEcology,” from my thesis work on immersion, hermaphroditic invertebrates, and studies in constitutive materializations, which laid the foundation for my ruminations on echinoderms and transsexuals. Barad’s questioning guided me to refine my nascent interrogatives about what it meant to be “of” a space rather than “in” a space, and to think about how “sex reassignment surgery” for transsexuals was more about re-generative healing (“like a starfish”) rather than trans-formative loss.
6. Some of these auto-ethnographic accounts first appeared in my 2009 essay, “Transpositions (Three Forms).”

7. Walter Benjamin (1978) writes: “At the base of the cliff itself, where it touches the shore, caves have been hewn.... As porous as this stone is the architecture. Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything they preserve the scope to become a theater of new, unforeseen, constellations. The stamp of the definitive is avoided. No situation appears intended forever, no figure asserts its ‘thus and not otherwise.’ This is how architecture, the most binding part of the communal rhythm, comes into being here.” Benjamin describes an almost erotic interchange between place and flesh – distinctions between body and architecture dissolve, melt, and flow.
8. Poet Mary Oliver gives a beautiful account of an encounter with the same species of spider in “Swoon” (1999). She describes the spider’s capacity for “more.” She writes, “Perhaps the spiders feel upon the tender hairs of their bodies the cool, damp cellar air, and it is a lure. They want more” (87).

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