

A Program for
Trans Existentialism

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The first nuclear bomb was built at Los Alamos in 1945, ushering in an international security regime in which the threat of total annihilation became a seemingly new reality. In order to manage this threat,

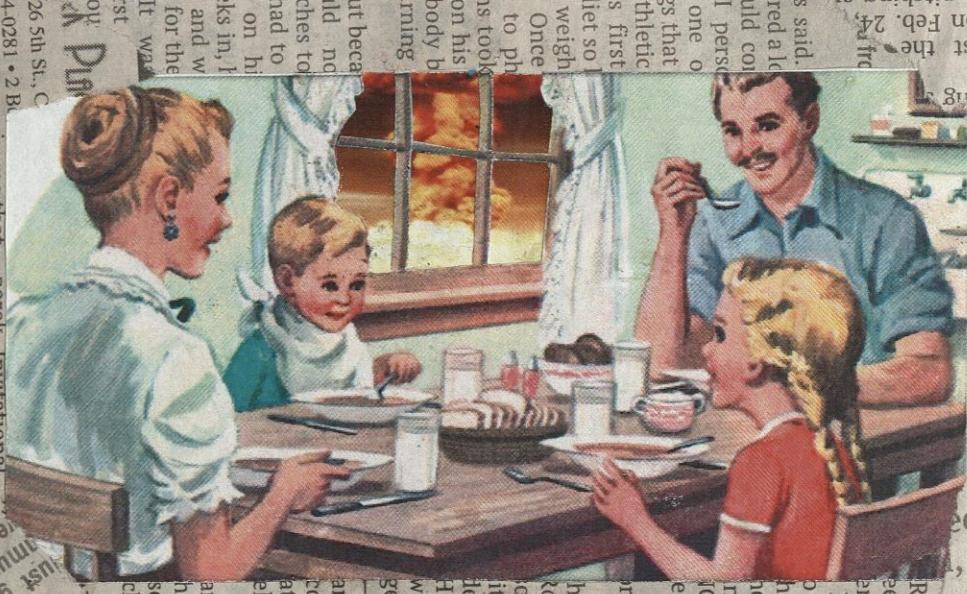
Women's and gender historians of the United States have long recognized that the birth of the atomic age invested the heteronormative, white domestic sphere with new ideological meaning. The effects of atomic blasts were measured by their impact on a "large-size house," a measurement that made sense in light of the nuclear family's outsized role as a perceived bulwark against the communist threat. Both white domesticity and white women's sexuality helped the public acclimate to atomic technology and make sense of what it meant to live in an atomic age. The "bikini" was famously named after the atoll of the Marshall Islands where the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) tested its mightiest weapons. Attractive women were dubbed "bombshells"—a name that implied that their beauty could be devastating. Simultaneously, Cold War culture equated the protection of a sanctified white domestic sphere with protection of the nation as a whole.⁷ During the postwar years, the heteronormative—nuclear family sat at the heart of patriotic anticommunist white life.

(Voyles)¹

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Enter Christine Jorgenson. A former soldier from the Bronx, Christine entered a pharmacy in 1949 asking for estradiol, telling the clerk it was for a research project. After going to Denmark for sex reassignment surgery her transition quickly made international headlines, with People Today reporting in 1954, "after other transsexual stories had broken in the media", that "Next to the recurrent hydrogen bomb headlines, reports of sex changes are becoming the most consistently startling world news."²

¹Traci Brynne Voyles, "Anatomic Bombs: The Sexual Life of Nuclearism", <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/765827/figure/fig03>, published September 2020, IOWA RC

² Susan Stryker, "Christine Jorgensen's Atom Bomb: Transsexuality and the Emergence of Postmodernity" in *Playing Dolly: Technocultural Formations, Fantasies, and Fictions of Assisted Reproduction*, published 1999.

EX-GI BECOMES BLONDE BEAUTY

Operations Transform Bronx Youth

Jorgenson's hypervisibility meant that "The spectacle of transsexuality had mushroomed into public consciousness during the early days of the Cold War with all the force of a blistering hot wind roaring across the Trinity Test Site".³ This new nuclear force, *in tandem with the bomb*, was weaponized to produce a political economy oriented around the consolidation of the nuclear family by upholding the sanctity of white womanhood

Emily Skidmore 2011 (Associate Professor and Interim Chair U.S. History, Gender and Sexuality. Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Constructing the "Good Transsexual": Christine Jorgensen, Whiteness, and Heteronormativity in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Press. Feminist Studies , Summer 2011, Vol. 37, No. 2, p. 271-278) Hawkeyes

Building on the emergent scholarship on transgender studies, this article denaturalizes the preeminent position Jorgensen has enjoyed with in historical treatments of transsexuality and highlights the significance of Jorgensen's whiteness within public representations. By discussing Jorgensen in relation to the numerous other transwomen who appeared in the mainstream media in the mid-twentieth century, I track the formation of the "transsexual" within popular discourse. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was those transwomen (primarily Jorgensen) depicted with the most proximity to white womanhood, who gained the most visibility in the main stream press and whose stories therefore came to define the boundaries of "transsexual" identity. In order to illustrate this, I will discuss the representations of three white transwomen from the 1950s: Christine Jorgensen, Charlotte McLeod, and Tamara Rees. I argue that these white transwomen were able to articulate transsexuality as an acceptable subject position through an embodiment of the norms of white womanhood,² most notably domesticity, respectability, and heterosexuality. However, this maneuver was only possible through the subjugation of other gender variant bodies; as the subject position of the transsexual was sanitized in the mainstream press and rendered visible through whiteness, other forms of gender variance were increasingly made visible through nonwhiteness. To illustrate this, I will discuss the representations of three transwomen of color who appeared in the mainstream, tabloid, and African American press in the 1950s and 1960s: Marta Olmos Ramiro, Laverne Peterson, and Delisa Newton. Although each of these transwomen articulated their embodiment in ways similar to Jorgensen, McLeod, and Rees, their bodies were less intelligible as "authentic" (read: white women), and therefore they appeared in the mainstream press as subjects of ridicule, not as "authentic" transsexuals. Taken together, this article highlights the disciplining power of racialized gender ideologies, ideologies that regulate which bodies appear within the public sphere as legitimate and which bodies appear only in order to be disparaged. This study focuses on representations of transsexuality in the mass circulation press in the period between 1952 and 1966, as it was during this period that advances in medical technology first made sex reassignment surgery possible; thus, it was in these years that the subject position of "the transsexual" was first introduced to popular audiences. Because it was through the mass circulation press—not medical literature—that most Americans learned about transsexuality, it is therefore vital to understand the narrative structures that allowed the figure of the transsexual to have coherence within popular discourse.³ Thus, in this article, I am particularly interested in tracking the ways in which the mass circulation press positioned transsexual identity vis-a-vis other social groups, because, as Stuart Hall has written, "There is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'."⁴ In order to get at popular narratives of transsexuality, I have interrogated a wide range of sources, from mainstream weekly magazines such as Time and Newsweek to popular daily newspapers such as New York's Daily News, from African American publications such as Sepia and Ebony to cult tabloid magazines such as Mr. and Whisper. I pay particular attention to the ways in which narratives of transsexuality changed as they traveled from one publication to the next but ultimately prioritize the narratives that were produced in publications with the widest circulation.⁵ Taken together, this essay asks, how was it that Jorgenson came to be produced as a "good transsexual" as opposed to "sex deviant"? What normative investments undergirded her celebrity? And lastly, which bodies were subjugated by the creation of the notion of a "good transsexual"? 'I Could Have Gone for That He-She Girl,' Says Reporter" Christine Jorgensen

³ Stryker, "Christine Jorgensen's Atom Bomb"



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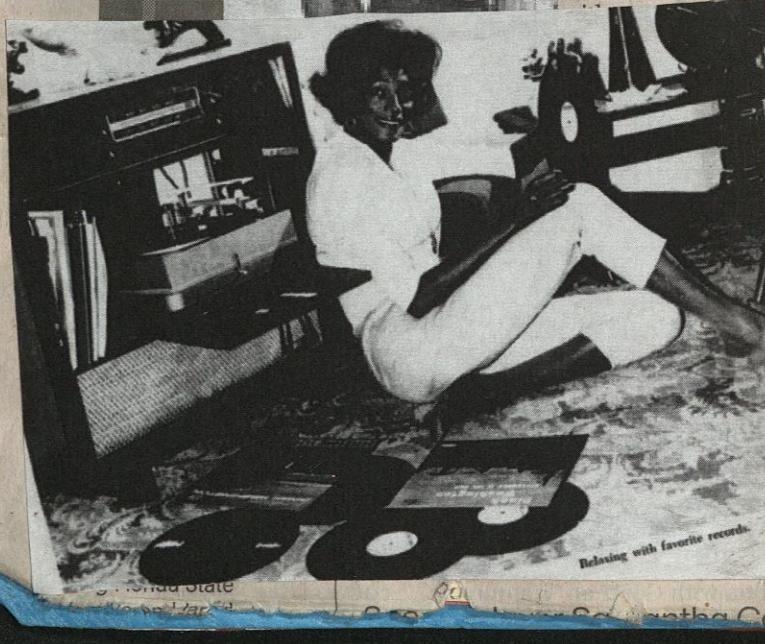
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Delisa Newton

...Gangsta Rap discusses his favorite

Left -
Marta Olmos Ramiro.
Mexico City

Below -

Laverne Peterson,
in Honolulu

exactly what I'm supposed to do."

The transfer from La Salle wasn't just an on-field decision for McGroarty. She left a



emerged in the mainstream press amidst rapid suburbanization, increasing birthrates, and heightened cold war tensions. In this context, popular culture and political rhetoric each upheld the nuclear family—complete with a male breadwinner and a stay-at-home mother—as the American ideal, a social formation promising both personal happiness and national defense against communism. This connection was perhaps nowhere more visible than in the 1959 "kitchen debate" between Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the American Exhibition in Moscow that year. Amidst the display of model homes, washing machines, and other appliances, Nixon remarked that this is "what freedom means to us." As many historians have pointed out, this image of domestic tranquility did not describe life as experienced by all Americans, yet it nonetheless represented an ideal that all Americans were instructed to strive for.⁶ Indeed, social formations that threatened the stability of the nuclear family fell under particular scrutiny in the mid-twentieth century, and gender and sexual deviancy were often equated with political subversion. In 1950, for example, the U.S. Senate held hearings on homosexuals "and other sex perverts" working for the government, spurring both the purge of thousands of lesbians and gay men from government agencies and also increased police surveillance of gay communities throughout the 1950s and 1960s.⁷ Given the heightened concern over the domestic nuclear family and proper gendered and sexual behavior, it should be considered no small coincidence that representations of Jorgensen corresponded with the image of femininity that was most idealized in the mid-twentieth century. As a blond, heterosexual, and domestically oriented woman, Jorgensen's appearance in the mainstream press introduced readers to the concept of transsexuality and yet simultaneously assured them of continued dominance of gender roles forged in reference to white heteropatriarchy. Tellingly, the December 1, 1952, headline that announced Jorgensen's transformation to the world read "Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty" (fig. 1). With these words, the Daily News announced that Jorgensen's sex reassignment surgery had not simply turned Charles into Christine, but it had also transformed her into a "blond beauty." Demure blonde women represented the gender norm of white womanhood in the mid-twentieth century and regulated the gender intelligibility of all women in visual representations.⁸ Therefore, the phrase "blond beauty" simultaneously aligned Jorgensen's body with an idealized femininity and asserted her desirability as a woman to an assumed male viewer. The caption below her "before" picture read "A World of Difference," suggesting that Jorgensen's body had been completely transformed by the procedure, again indicating to the male viewer that Jorgensen's body was an acceptable object of heterosexual desire. Similarly, in its coverage of Jorgensen's return to the United States in February 1953, the San Francisco Examiner reported: "Chris tine is not only female; she's a darn good looking female. She's tall, very blonde and chic."⁹ In this way, from the earliest press coverage of Jorgensen's story, her body was produced as definitively female in part through her embodiment of the physical qualities of an idealized form of femininity: her white skin, blond hair, and slender frame garnered constant comment throughout her tenure in the media, and these comments ensured that her body would be intelligible as female to readers. However, given the heightened importance placed on the nuclear family in the 1950s, Jorgensen's intelligibility as female also rested upon her participation in a nuclear family unit. As such, the prominent place of Jorgensen's mother and father in much of her early coverage within the mainstream press was particularly significant. Articles repeatedly cited how supportive her parents were throughout the lengthy process of sex reassignment, and many images were published after her return to the United States showing Jorgensen in the loving arms of her family. In one Daily News article, her father is quoted saying he thinks Christine "deserves an award higher than the Congressional Medal of Honor" because she was brave enough to act as a pioneer within the field of sex reassignment surgery.¹⁰ Additionally, in Jorgensen's 1953 autobiographical series in American Weekly (a magazine delivered to over 9.5 million homes), she appeared in several domestic photographs, one in which she was cooking in the kitchen with her mother, who reportedly was showing Jorgensen "some kitchen tricks."¹¹ These images, along with her frequent assertions that she desired to one day get married, helped Jorgensen illustrate that her body was contained within normative kinship structures—not opposed to them. These images also helped to produce Jorgensen's body through notions of middle-class respectability—another factor that helped to normalize her body as a white woman. A Los Angeles Times article from May 1953 reported: "Christine Jorgensen is pretty, personable, and pleasant—by any standard. She's courteous and intelligent, too. Over lunch in a suite at the Statler yesterday, this reporter forgot to remember her past maleness and saw only the present femininity and charm."¹² In this quotation, Jorgensen's femininity is enabled by her embodiment of respectability, a vital aspect of white womanhood because of its connection to civility. In this way, it did not matter that Jorgensen grew up in the Bronx, the son of a carpenter; what was important was that as Christine she presented her self in ways corresponding to traditional notions of middle-class respectability—a respectability inherently

racialized as white. In the days and months that followed, newspapers across the country published countless articles

retelling the story, solidifying Jorgensen's status as a cultural icon. However, Jorgensen was not completely unaware of the press's expectations of her embodiment. She told the Washington Post in 1970, "Unlike other women I had to become super-female. I couldn't have a single masculine trait." Tellingly, the Post reporter followed up by stating: "And she doesn't. She looks a bit like Lana Turner. . . . She has beautiful skin, shapely legs, soft feminine hands which she uses gracefully to gesture, push back her blonde curls or play with her black beads, and large grey eyes with lots of real eyelashes."¹³ Here, Jorgensen's identity as a woman is naturalized by noting her "real" eyelashes and her "soft feminine hands," and perhaps most of all, by comparing her to 1940s pinup girl, Lana Turner. With each of these phrases, interviewer Sally Quinn naturalized Jorgensen's femininity and signaled her alignment with heteronormativity. In fact, Jorgensen's allegiance to heteronormativity was one of the key elements that enabled her body to be read as within normative kinship structures, respectable, attractive, and available to male viewers; in order to be read as acceptably female and not strangely deviant, Jorgensen's body had to be intelligible as heterosexual.

One of the primary ways through which Jorgensen asserted her heterosexuality was by distancing herself from other "deviant" groups and providing the mainstream press with a narrative of her embodiment that was distinct from narratives of homosexuality or cross-dressing. In her American Weekly series, for example, Jorgensen made a point of explaining that after surgeons had successfully reassigned her sex, she did not begin dressing as a woman until the sex on her passport had officially been changed by the U.S. Embassy in Copenhagen.¹⁴ In this way, Jorgensen avoided being accused of ever having been a male cross-dresser, and, perhaps more importantly, Jorgensen placed her embodiment in terms of proper U.S. citizenship and narrated her sex reassignment through her allegiance to the disciplining apparatus of the U.S. state.

Implied here is the suggestion that gender deviants cross-dress, but proper citizens dress according to the gender assigned to them by the state. Jorgensen further articulated her allegiance to heteronormativity by illustrating her repulsion to homosexuality and other forms of sexuality considered immoral by mainstream America. In her 1967 autobiography, for example, Jorgensen described an incident prior to her transition in which she was the subject of the sexual advances of a man. The move reportedly sickened Jorgensen to the extent that she "spun away from his lumbering figure and pushed blindly through the crowd of young people into the darkness, heading for the beach . . . leaned over the edge of the pier and vomited."¹⁵ In this scene, Jorgensen not only violently rejected a man's advances, but the suggestion of same-sex sexual activity elicited a visceral response of disgust. This scene is significant as it suggests that Jorgensen strove to appeal to mainstream readers rather than to readers who shared same-sex desire.

Throughout Jorgensen's tenure in the public spotlight, she articulated conservative sexual mores that likely served to assure readers that her public presence was not motivated by a political agenda seeking to challenge the sanctity of heteropatriarchy. For example, in Jorgensen's 1954 interview with True Confessions Associate

Editor Roy Aid, Jorgensen registered her distaste for prostitution. When Aid expressed sympathy for a prostitute who had recently been put on trial in New York City, Jorgensen replied, "I don't see why you should feel anything toward her. Those people make me sick. It's all right as long as they get away with what they're doing, but once they get caught they weep and plead for mercy. She had her fun—now she has to pay the price." When Aid countered that the woman in question came from "a broken home," Jorgensen "became more incensed. She couldn't stand people putting the blame on society to avoid personal responsibility for their actions."¹⁶ In this way, Jorgensen signaled her alignment with conservative sexual mores and values that prized personal responsibility. The stakes of such

positioning are clear; in the 1950s, the period in which transsexuality was introduced to the main stream public, homosexuality, cross-dressing, and other forms of sexual and gender variance were often collapsed into the singular category of deviance; thus, in order to gain acceptance, transsexuals had to articulate their distinctiveness from other pathologized minorities they might have been grouped with. Indeed, despite widespread criticism, Jorgensen was able to present herself as a respectable woman and continued to be represented positively in newspapers around the country throughout the mid-twentieth century. As Joanne Meyerowitz has written, Like Helen Keller, she served for some readers as a model of how the human will might triumph over adversity. . . . With ambition and a sense of mission, she perpetuated her popularity and kept herself on stage. Although she could not control the media, she asserted her presence, and she refused to let the press define her. She told a story that humanized her and defended her right to pursue her own happiness, and she pushed the public to acknowledge her status as a woman.¹⁷ However, what I am interested in exploring are the normative investments that aided in Jorgensen's effort to "humanize" her story, namely, her avowed allegiance to white heteronormativity. Jorgensen was able to prevent the press from defining her because she had access to the institutional power of white womanhood—institutional power that allowed her to speak for herself, insisting that her words be taken seriously.

Indeed, in order for Jorgensen to be taken seriously as a woman, she had to participate in the subjugation of other nonnormative bodies.

In what follows, I will discuss other transsexuals who appeared in the press during the mid-twentieth century—none of whom were able to achieve the status of "good transsexual" in quite the same way that Jorgensen was. This failure is no accident, however, but the grounds upon which Jorgensen claimed respectability.

The resolution call to debate nuclear forces cannot be detached from the nuclear family logics that shape the contours of subjectivity - Jorgenson's story was spectacular because domesticity is fundamental to the nuclear family unit, yet transsexual technologies have the capability to threaten the foundations of US empire – in order to manage the threat, the US had to create the image of an 'acceptable transsexual' in relation to racialized systems of hierarchy

Just as nuclear technology split the atom to literally destroy matter, transsexual technology destroyed the stable materiality of biological sex, thereby ungrounding gender representation from its presumed physical referent, and demanding new epistemological frameworks for structuring the semiotic production of embodiment's gendered meanings. Jorgensen's spectacularity can thus be read as a map of emergent postmodern conditions of signification in the mid-twentieth century; the "transsexual phenomenon" she figured can be seen as an ontologizing practice that resignified the relationship between gendered subject and sexed flesh within post-World War II biomedical and technocultural environment (Stryker 1999). Building upon this earlier argument, in the present article I am interested in using Jorgensen's visit to the US post-colony of the Philippines, which had been granted independence only in 1945, to begin remapping the global spectacle of her transsexuality as a white (post)colonial phenomenon. It is not Jorgensen's pale skin or Scandinavian-American cultural heritage that made her white, but rather the processes through which her presence racializes others while rendering opaque her own racialization, and the means by which unspoken prerogatives and presumed entitlements over the lives of others circulate invisibly beneath a mask of a presumed universality. Jorgensen's light-featured phenotype merely allows her to function as a white screen onto which is projected all that is fantasized of the metropole in relation to the colony: wealth, glamour, mobility, liberation, and self-fashioning, all situated according a spatialized racial hierarchy that locates darkness in the heart of the colonized territory, and whiteness at the colonizing imperative's point of origin. Jorgensen's on-screen appearance in Kaming Mga Talyada allows us to ask, in the words of Alfred Lopez, "what happens to whiteness after empire", and to assess the ways in which white cultural norms remain embedded in postcolonial societies "as the marker or index of the traces of colonial legacies that yet lie latent (but not dormant) in the postcolonial world's own 'colonial unconscious,' which it owes to itself to uncover and interrogate" (Lopez 2005, 4, 6). If we acknowledge that the "white woman's body" has been depicted in American film as the fantasmatic space of the nation's birth at least since Birth of a Nation, perhaps we can begin to trace, through the figure of Christine Jorgensen, the outlines of the new US polity that emerged in the aftermath of World War II a global (post)colonial neo-empire with its own peculiar administrative logics linking bodies, identities, territories, and populations, that become visible even in within seemingly obscure cinematic texts.

(Stryker)⁴

⁴Susan Stryker, "We Who Are Sexy: Christine Jorgensen's transsexual whiteness in the postcolonial Philippines", <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10350330802655551>, published March 2009, pg. 81, IOWA RC

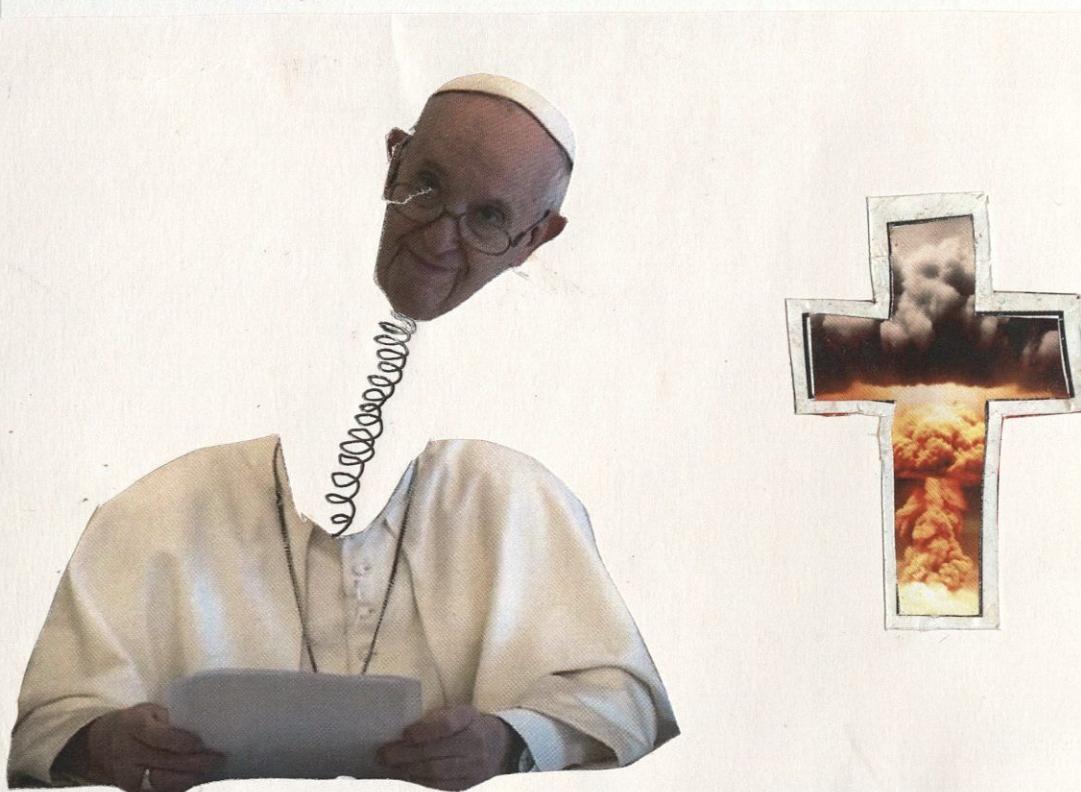
Instruments of militarism don't end with Jorgenson but are extended to the current cold war period - Robert Foster's claim that trans people need to be killed by firing squad⁵ or Michael Knowles calls to eradicate transgenderism⁶ are part of the increased campaigns to eliminate the threat of 'transsexual technologies' because we are existential to the nuclear family –

In the words Pope Francis the II –

"Let's think of the nuclear arms, of the possibility to annihilate in a few instants a very high number of human beings,"

"Let's think also of genetic manipulation" ... "or of the gender theory, that does not recognize the order of creation."

"With this attitude, man commits a new sin, that against God the Creator,".⁷



Any discussion of nuclear reductions that fails to theorize the intimate connections between nuclearism and the family will reproduce the logistics of empire and antitrans violence that mark transness as the threat to creation – as countless antitrans bills are introduced and passed debate deploys a *narrative coherence* centered around apocalypticism and supposedly liberal policy discussion to lock in ongoing logics of elimination – trans people are forced to erase our histories, archives, and stories for safety or transition while the scientific study of transness is conducted by cis people - transness only gains coherence within the rehearsed scripts of debate if it is localizable, measurable, and observable like the atom

⁵ Ashton Pittman, "Ex-GOP Gov Candidate Calls For 'Firing Squad' For Trans Rights Supporters, Political Foes", <https://www.mississippifreepress.org/22283/ex-gop-gov-candidate-calls-for-firing-squad-for-trans-rights-supporters-political-foes>, published 3/25/2022, IOWA RC

⁶ Mathew Rodrigues, "CPAC Speaker Michael Knowles Says 'Transgenderism Must Be Eradicated'", <https://www.them.us/story/michael-knowles-transgenderism-cpac>, published 3/6/2023, IOWA RC

⁷ Pope Francis qtd. by CBS San Francisco in "Pope Francis Compares Transgender People To Nuclear Weapons In New Book", <https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco/news/pope-francis-compares-transgender-people-to-nuclear-weapons-in-new-book/>, published 2/20/2015, IOWA RC

In response, this debate is about alternative worldmaking tactics – what we do here and now to make life livable - the 1AC's *program of trans existentialism* holds together a dual set of commitments towards trans archival practice, liberation, and networks of care that challenge the epistemic violence of spectacular narratives like Jorgenson's – the precarity of nuclear forces demands a constellation of shared collectivity

Haulotte 2/1 (Penelope Haulotte, PhD student in philosophy pursuing a women, gender, and sexuality studies certification at the University of New Mexico, "Program for a Transgender Existentialism", <https://read.dukeupress.edu/tsq/article/10/1/32/357429/Program-for-a-Transgender-Existentialism>, published 2/1/2023, IOWA RC)

Trans theory is characterized in part by the apparent tension between discursive analyses of cisgender society and phenomenological descriptions of trans experience. Foucaultian discourse analysis takes the form of an examination of how cisgender society constructs trans subjects as objects of medical, criminological, and political discourses, while phenomenology attends to a systematic description of first-person experiences. Henry Rubin long ago pointed out that the danger of discourse analysis is that it risks reducing the particular experiences of trans people to mere effects of a discourse, as is apparent in Bernice Hausman's claim that transsexuals are defined by the demand for sex reassignment surgery or by the cisgender tendency to interpret trans people as "dupes of gender."¹ While traditional inquiry into the history of philosophy proposes an interminable opposition between phenomenology and discourse analysis, Rubin's alternative suggestion is that within the domain of trans studies that they fulfill complimentary dimensions of investigation. Discourse analysis and phenomenology converge in trans studies because they are submitted to the same ethical and political imperative: the systematic development of the trans archive. Both discourse analysis and phenomenology as methods in trans studies are directed toward the development of a genuinely trans history, perspective, and theory, with special methodological consideration of the way that this perspective is misunderstood or obscured by dominant frameworks within cisgender society. In what follows, I provide a brief reconstruction of two major interventions in trans phenomenology, demonstrating that each is carefully concerned with distinctly archival considerations, but I further argue that each project remains unfinished because of an incomplete bracketing of medicalized cisgender concepts. I then propose a brief alternative program aimed at the full suspension of cisgender categories that I call transgender existentialism. Edmund Husserl discovered phenomenological description through what he called a certain kind of bracketing procedure: some assumptions, the sum of which he called the "natural attitude," had to be "neutralized" or "put out of action" to reveal the salient phenomena for description.⁴ The essential precondition to opening the domain of phenomenology is closing the world of natural objects and representations. Phenomenological description therefore characterizes itself through a neutralization of certain assumptions, prejudices, and explanatory strategies, which are so various and deeply ingrained that a systematic procedure is required for their complete suspension. Trans phenomenology retains from classical phenomenology the idea that phenomenology is characterized by a certain bracketing procedure but differs entirely as to the motivation for the suspension and the nature of the attitude suspended. Hence trans phenomenology is not merely the application of a classically given method to a new object of investigation. Rather, by bracketing cisgender categories, trans phenomenology is a politically motivated, qualitative transformation of the very contours of phenomenology itself. This transformation is responsible for certain inevitable misunderstandings of trans phenomenology's corpus, method, and technique from the perspective of the classically trained cisgender phenomenologist. To begin with, the attitude suspended is completely different: rather than bracket the natural attitude, the trans phenomenologist brackets what I will call the cisgender attitude, that is, the cultivated disposition to organize society based on mandatory gender identifications. Just as the natural attitude for Husserl was deeply ingrained and so in need of a systematic procedure for the thoroughgoing suspension of such an attitude, so too a systematic method is required in trans phenomenology but set to completely different purposes. Trans phenomenology has a distinctively emancipatory aim: to clarify trans forms of life, not through further specification of the

categories of cisgender society, but through an intimate return to trans experience itself. The corpus of trans phenomenology—the set of texts utilized as the source material for the phenomenological investigation in question—**seems** completely anarchic from the classical cisgender perspective. gone are the traditional analyses of chairs and desks, of space and time, and the readings and rereadings of Marcel Proust, in favor of an uneasy blending of statements concerning the self in poetry, literature, theater, photography, and zines using an apparent hodgepodge of techniques from psychoanalysis, to queer theory, to decolonial theory, and beyond. The difference in source material is related to the differences in bracketing and technique. The promise of trans phenomenology is therefore intimately bound up with the possibility of producing a discursive regime in which the attitude of cisgender society is completely suspended. This dynamic underlies Prosser's (1998) approach to trans phenomenology in Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality. Second Skins is regularly considered to be one of the pioneering works in trans phenomenology, despite the fact that he makes no use of any traditional phenomenological concepts and that the only comment about phenomenology in the book is negative.⁵ Nonetheless, what is manifestly apparent in Second Skins are the archival considerations of trans phenomenology: the text concerns itself with trans stories, and especially the stories that trans people tell about themselves, and the intricate and highly complex means by which these narratives are distorted by a cisgender frame. The questions motivating his work are the following: What is our history? Who are our dead? Where is our literature? Where may we be seen, heard, or understood by one another? How do we come to misunderstand and misrecognize one another? This is the basis of his opposition to queer theory. For Prosser, queer theory utilizes the figure of the transsexual as the apotheosis of disrupting normative gender categories.⁶ But what are the effects of reducing the transsexual to a mere trope of a broader notion of queerness? If queer theory approaches the transsexual as useful in disrupting normative gender categories, what does the transsexual make of themselves? How might they move differently or beyond the purview of a cisgender queer theory? For Prosser the eidetic structure of the trans subject stems from a certain narrative coherence: trans subjects are those who undergo the experience of "living in the wrongly sexed body."⁷ This condition—which we may refer to as gender dysphoria—structures the lives of trans people into a relatively coherent set of events: there is the unhappy childhood, the horrific years of puberty, uncomfortable mirror scenes, the conflation of one's transness with queerness, the epiphany, the arch confessional moment of recounting one's narrative for the doctors, the beginning of transition, hormones, sex reassignment surgery, and closure. The shared narrative admits of some permutation: some will die before they receive sex reassignment surgery and genuine healing, others will never successfully navigate the medical establishment, and, finally, there is the troubling category of "transgender," those members of the trans community who do not quite fit his "wrongly bodied" model. As Prosser's recounting might suggest, trans phenomenology is for him rightly considered transsexual phenomenology.⁸ The essential nature of trans experience is the central motivating dynamic of living in the wrong body. The notion of trans people willingly eliding this body modification provides a fundamental problem for Prosser's account.⁹ In his view, this is the effect of another archetypal transsexual experience: the conflation of transsexual experience with queer experience. For Prosser, living outside or beyond the gender binary is a largely unfortunate effect of living in the wrong body. Part of his polemic with queer theory involves establishing the superiority of the analytic of sex over gender: for Prosser, what trans people experience is a wrongly sexed body, not an inadequate form of gender expression, and so the conflation of transsexual and cisgender queer interests has the effect of masking important dimensions of trans experience. The next intervention in trans phenomenology I will investigate stems from a pair of books by Salamon: Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality (2010) and The Life and Death of Latisha King: A Critical Phenomenology of Transphobia (2018). Assuming a Body provides an alternative phenomenology of embodiment than we find in Prosser, while The Life and Death of Latisha King utilizes the resources of critical phenomenology to interpret the trial of Brandon McInierny, a cisgender teenager who murdered his trans classmate, Latisha King. In essence, Salamon seeks to reverse the priority of the sex/gender analytic as it is utilized by Prosser. Salamon points out that both Prosser and Hausman ultimately maintain that transsexual subjectivity is defined chiefly by the demand for sex reassignment surgery, and that Prosser concludes with cisgender society that we are in some way our genitals.¹⁰ This is the qualitative shift at the core of Salamon's analysis: what Prosser indexes to "sex" is better understood through the conceptual framework offered by "gender."¹¹ The emancipatory potential undergirding demands for gender reassignment surgery does not stem from a "correction" of living in the "wrong" body, but from the heightened capacity for gendered expression. Similarly, in her analysis of the trial of Brandon McInierny, Salamon points out that Latisha was interpreted as an aggressor, and the violence she suffered was justified largely in part because of her nonnormative gender expression.¹² Salamon claims that a new trans phenomenology would not simply accept cisgender society's categorization of sex, but would try to show how this appeal to sex is in fact an effect of gender.¹³ The central problem of Salamon's trans phenomenology concerns the unity and distinctiveness of trans experience. If being trans is not living in the wrongly sexed body, what is it, exactly? Consider Solomon's reinterpretation of gender dysphoria. For Salamon, gender dysphoria is dissatisfaction with gender expression that is experienced by cis and trans people alike.¹⁴ This follows a tendency common to queer and trans theory to claim that queer cisgender people also experience gender dysphoria because they experience dissatisfaction with the existing gender system (see Dembroff 2019: 61). Through an oblique and circuitous pathway,

Salamon actually returns to the original thesis of queer theory: that the central political category for thinking about nonnormative gender identity is queerness and that being trans is a mere modification of being queer. Moreover, this seems to be the result from her critical phenomenology of transphobia: that transphobia is rooted primarily in a phobic reaction to nonnormative gender expression. It is hard to understand, given the conceptual apparatus put forward by Salamon, what political function a distinctively trans phenomenology can fulfill if there is not a shared political situation that can attest to the urgency of such a project or demonstrate its own internal coherence. Salamon's framework, if correct, posits more than a rapprochement between queer theory and trans theory; trans theory itself appears reabsorbed into queer theory. This review of the debate between Prosser and Salamon allows us to note several features about the contours of trans phenomenology as it has progressed up to this point. In each case, what is at stake is a suspension of cisgender concepts, schemes, and attitudes to produce a genuinely trans archive, but one that remains nevertheless incomplete, for the central theoretical apparatuses used by each are outgrowths of cisgender medical categories. For while Prosser attempts to identify the distinctive coherence of a trans form of life, he is forced to think of this life as almost entirely defined by the parameters dictated by a cisgender medical establishment and paradigmatically describes "successful" transsexual transition. For Prosser there is a phenomenological essence of transsexual experience. Yet, if Prosser's analysis remains too confined to a certain sequence of narrative events tied to specific corporeal experiences, Salamon's turn to gender does little to help. As trans theorists and historians such as Gill-Peterson have analyzed at length, the contemporary notion of gender is essentially an outgrowth of an epistemological crisis concerning the unity of various "sexed characteristics," and therefore it belongs to the same discursive order as sex.¹⁵ The turn to gender ultimately does not alleviate the epistemological problems of sex but displaces them into psychology, and it becomes difficult to see within the apparatus of gender how transgendered experience is simply one nonnormative modality among others. Escaping this dialectic of embodiment requires a radical rethinking of the unity of trans experience. The problem is that ultimately both Prosser and Salamon tacitly adopt a cisgender orientation toward the question of trans identity by posing the unity of trans experience in some shared positive characteristic or narrative coherence.¹⁶ The recognition of this fact results in the continual oscillation between the claim that there is an essence to trans identity (Prosser) and the denial of the coherence of such an identity (Salamon). Transgender existentialism proposes that trans people have an existential rather than eidetic unity; in other words, what trans people share is a unity of situation, project, and responsibility rather than resemblances between properties, bodies, or experiences. This perspective on embodiment was originally opened by Simone de Beauvoir (2011: 46): "The body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and the outline for our projects."¹⁷ If and when there is a resemblance between our psychic, somatic, and narrative experiences as trans people, it is the result of a more essential underlying shared project. This would allow us to reclaim the concept of gender dysphoria from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and cisgender society in the name of trans theory: gender dysphoria describes the situation of alienation and unfreedom experienced by trans subjects in cisgender society. Here, through a certain suspension, a medicalized category can become a political one. If Prosser overstates the unity of trans experience and Salamon understates it, transgender existentialism sees the unity of trans people as essentially precarious and the result of our shared collective resolution. This is to claim, in essence, that there is a certain political responsibility that is one of the only universally shared features across trans experience, though of course it is an essential possibility of human experience to live in bad faith about such a deep responsibility. In Sartre's terms, when we choose to transition, we are defending a distinctive vision of human freedom that entails a concomitant revolutionary political consequence: the project of trans people requires upturning the very situation (cisgender society) that is the source of their unity. Similarly, Leslie Feinberg (1998) once claimed in a true moment of proletarian lucidity that the political responsibility of the trans liberation movement extends infinitely, to genuine liberation for everyone.¹⁸ The neutralization of cisgender society must extend beyond the armchair of the phenomenologist, into the material neutralization of cisgender society, which is to say, into the streets.¹⁹

Trans existentialism demands a restriction of the nuclear forces which constitute the violence of the nuclear family. This restriction emerges from the im/possibility of trans sociality, supplanting the nuclear family and nuclear state with a fugitive collectivity.

For those who have been disappeared

For Delisa, Marta, Laverne

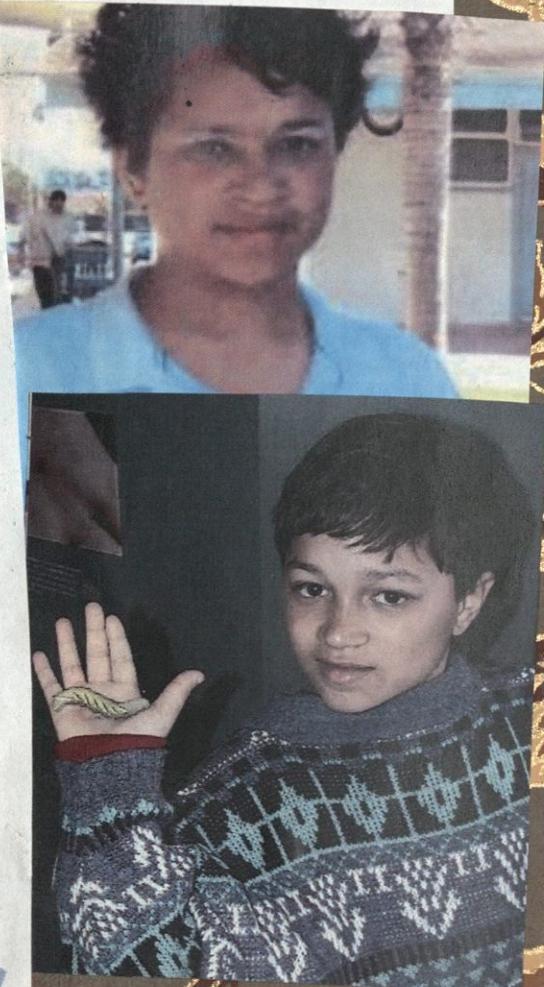
For those who haven't been invited

For Latisha

Trans existentialism is

Decorated hands placed down on a wooden table, overpopulated with mismatched chairs. Sensations and the week's torrent of memories begin, extending the number of tables underneath the notebook, headphones & mobile. The Victorian kitchen, the heat of the oven, lone, steam on the back door window; yellow light, dark out. **The company of teatimes, bodies beginning to creep back through the house, echoing down the stairs, enter at the green doors. The volume of the kettle, those who congregate on the reclaimed furniture, a quality of the table itself. These are the sites of feminist, queer, trans belonging, production lines as chopping boards, mutual aid shared out on plates.** Another table, evening, café lit, Soho, cheesecake, solitude, text, company of femmes, the sharing of what may be in common. The night flowing, queer space, volumes low, beverages, the glass window with flyers spread, the desiring that lies inside the red shop-front, the flag, these queer institutions of years effaced in the narratives of progress, **the quiet nights of caffeine, red wine, conversation, the afternoons of group meets, collations of what becomes community.**

Harsher: another domestic, an arm chair, the only one, wooden, green velvet, a cheap MDF desk, the smallest dining table, the condensation on windows – **these moments of autumn turning out to winter with the demise of daylight, September's vast reductions, the rapid switch into wain of the early afternoons, falling onto the wooden table underneath her hands, that brings these sensations out of the woodwork. The air electric to reap content, its failure, how the**



⁸Excerpts from Nat Raha, "Solidarity & House" in Love & Solidarity, Solidarity & Love, published 2020, IOWA RC)

appointment ruptures into discontent, the practice of youthful irresponsibility, the im/practice of sharing domestic spaces with strangers, the (re)enactment of one's own traumas onto others. She moves her hands to maintain the connection of the wood directly into the presence of memory again – the first autumn at the long wooden table, those traces of the commonplace, abuses of precarious domestics, recounted in processes of healing under the home-made lampshade, the decorations of Halloween or Diwali or Bonfire Night. Might all wooden tables link through the form of feminist diaspora, the practices of collective care, mutual aid, the communal form, situating them into a constellation well wrought, shared, travelled like the spices that stain them? She thought of Sara Ahmed, of Kitchen Table Press, of Jin Haritaworn's book, of how this constellation could span backwards through the decades, forwards to future formations, where we are holding each other together by what passes in and out of our mouths. A slice of cool air swoops with the opening of the door. If she could be simultaneously in these four rooms, at three tables, in two cafés split by a decade and what is taken from precarious queers and our communal forms by the accumulations of capital / processes of gentrification and displacement, could one also be at other kitchen tables, wooden tables one hasn't experienced? Of one's closest friend, 650 miles south across another border and sea, that of a long since passed literary idol, that of the philosopher in the privilege of contemplation, asleep on the handicraft of liberal enlightenment.

— Excuse me, but we have other customers who need this space, would you be able to move to the next table?

Lightened in tone, sanded. Solid. Her hands stretched flat, soft flesh on firm.

- Its impossible though, with all the tourists, everywhere
- The touristification...
- The screams, tears, the poses,
- The intensity of the child crying, getting more agonising
- [Sighs]
- But this is how it goes, we get together around a table, a kitchen table, we talk while chopping vegetables, courgettes, chillies, where else is there to talk?
- When we're out, there's always someone to overhear, a friend of an agent, haha, remember when that random person stopped to ask us about the zine—the new zine? When they were already talking about feminism?
- I mean, we joked about putting kitchens in public squares
- But for real!—At least it would bring people together! Its so much better when there are mouths to feed
- And at least we can talk... how many times have we arrived at the space where there's supposed to be a conversation, and we end up doing emotional labour. Educating privileged white cis guy academics, who don't know the first thing about trans, or feminism, or race, except that maybe they don't know anything, and I-
- It's literally the reassertion of a space of domination: my ignorance (my right to extract your knowledge) is more important than whatever discussion you would be having.
- [Sigh]
- Hold on, lemme wash my hands.
Holding. Wine. Talk. Drinking. A sofa (second hand, leather, worn).
An open plan kitchen – at least there's more than one person in it.
Appropriation. Broadcast.



*** (pg. 50-55)

All that coheres around a communal table, a kitchen seating for ten, the diverse array of reclaimed chairs, & what labours & maintains the table together. Dinner bowls of feels we chop & offer to nourish, the solidification of friendship, proximity, love & its problematics. The lift & carry of voices, of passion & the burns of marginal life.

Nightfall, condensed door, the singular oven, the fixtures past yet here holding a scene together, DIY lampshade framing, animalia.

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Kettle epics & herbal array, the play of tunes that steam by. Winter's depth pulls a site of heat for bodies, pool vegetation & proteins to feast, ceremony, the alternative to familial. If the wind gathers towards this incline, if it falls outside at the darkness of garden, its affect emerges familial. (Another time, it will peak, press/rock us into fear).

Floorboards extend the span of feet (as does materialism). Crescent yellow & green, racing out for the prospect of stability.

Small amalgams allow the prospect of opening. Meals, simplicity, run memories backwards, substantiate new contexts, the bringing together of queer & trans optimism / bodies, constellate what living that here may be fabricated.

All that could cohere around a kitchen table. A (possible) politics of foods, new socialities, how a communal form might be revealed were this articu/late wood placed in public. What sensations, spirit, conversation, sounds & tastes here become lived, the worlds & loves crafted, feline insight shared. Context pours what words & forms become communication, circles what affects co/here us to/gether. So much has been drained from the vitality of us, losing perspective on action & acting out.

You keep the recent past in perspective, when you didn't know these

books, signposts of deviance within the rural, work under the wars of empire. Your version of sensations in the house is of chaos, overwhelm, disruption – how the volume of abusers could permeate dinnertimes, feed arguments to disrupt. Speak of retreats, picnics on wooden floors, support on broken furniture, the remaking of rooms. Memory rewilds, crevices & books layered in dust, frames not about windows. Health splits out of reach here to piece. & Which love exits unscathed, given that the property relation may demand we all leave. Lay out what clouds the depth of our pores, what weighs down bodies away from speech or text, gear-ground into rooms. The banality of production abstracts from such states, provided one can maintain a relation with it (leaving the house, etc). On other nights, words stream out of the sub/conscious, give out what substance becomes nourishment of rest & dinner. (If this were at the collective dinner table, would it be infused with snatches of conversation & others' speech, the Frank O'Hara poem dashed off at the typewriter of a party?) Soft, furious, crushed, playing deep in the animation of passions, creativity.

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Solidarity. Substantiating a context, (being drawn into, materialised within) a social relation, with material and/or affective consequences, those institutional or predictable, obscure or precarious.

A flow of white feminists through a stairwell, a low corridor, the chatter of anticipation, life, the week, decompression, the necessary, relations, she is waiting for the moment of connection, finding, something to happen, to take one out of herself.

How the fabrics & thoughts, affects, sensations & knowledges of the body materialise, the shape & movements & gestures & postures of

the body, the enactments & creations that emerge from the body, from bodies together, the harmonies & dissonances, the banners, chants, screams & arguments, the stakes, the dinners, what solidifies flesh or flesh into body or into personhood. What categories of being, what labelling denying humanity, what conditions of humanity are necessary for solidarity to emerge – or how solidarity can overcome labellings, divisions, denials? Who does or might the day belong to with such substantiations?

Solid/airity. A process of sublimation. 'All that is solid melts into air' with the development of capitalist social relations, technological advances, the payments of the compensation for abolishing slavery as funding industrialisation. As developments in technology, the labour market, tend to transformation of human & animal & ecological life, tending to migration to urban areas, to the possibilities of queer social forms, ..., to a contemporary mediated by smart phones, Skype families & relationships, to our belonging in urban clusters & our separations between them, how are the forms that might bind us, in support, frayed & transformed, creating opportune, mediated forms of solidarity through the digital – of love, to, through this – while affecting the grounds of our possible belonging?

Art can re/collect, reassemble moments too, of course, placing us beside each other and the work in the same room, assembling & maintaining & cathexting an emotional or aesthetics sense/ation through which a world coheres. Belonging sediments back into us, pleasure of the senses reoriented from the dayworld. Percepts & sounds & memories occupying a mental space, having a profound physical affect on the body.

But is this enough? What forms of social, cultural & material

organisation might be assembled even within the capitalist day world, such that we could feed, enrich, maintain each other, make work

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together, break down the isolation of queers & other deviants such that our mutual enrichment isn't merely fragmentary, forgettable, disconnected? What oxygen might be borne, pressed, emitted into this context?

(P.g. 57)

Feta & spinach pie. Lentil cottage pie. Baked aubergine. Red pepper & tomato soup. Tandoori paneer. Dahl, poppadum, rice. Chickpea salad with tofu. Homemade pizza. Nut roast, roast potatoes & veg, spouts. Tofu & vegetable stir-fry. Popcorn with nutritional yeast. Beetroot salad. Mushroom carbonara. Jerk veg. Black bean chilli with cornbread. Quinoa salad with grilled courgette and avocado. Vietnamese summer rolls.

P.g. 60 - 65

Strategies for isolation. When functioning, collectivity teaches, instructs & motivates us to orient our work, our attentions & care, towards each other. These are strategies that can also be directed to ourselves, especially those of us who struggle with feelings of self worth (having been told, literally & materially, that we are less valuable, less worthy of care, affection & love than others, those who

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shine with social capital & conformity to the neoliberal order). By positing our own worth collectively, can we see it and refract the work that materialises as care – that is care – back towards ourselves? Especially in this moment where 'self-care' has come to be a label to stand in for the consumption of luxury commodities & forms of

lifestyle (not that these are bad in themselves, or problematic as a reified form of care – the problem is their form or shape as commodities).

She spends the dreaming day of being in a small house no/where; in practice she merely isolates amid white urbanity. She makes batch of one of the above dishes for herself, enough for three meals. The dishes are either washed or unwashed.

But why the need to bring ourselves together like this, to assemble the collective, as volatile and intricate as a spider's web, capturing light, resource and ourselves? To feel a sense of belonging, sure, in a context where difference, deviance, and precarity may have denied a sense of home, be that a familial home or a geographic place of home. To pool the recompense of our labour sold for wages, in the hope it could leave something steadfast for us, something that doesn't evaporate with rent. To show we are more than our value, more than the sum of our parts. To build something for a community used to having little, used to having to rent its spaces, used to watching their demolition with the progress and growth of capital. To demonstrate the power of working together, materially & individually.

To build something vibrant, which could help one weather their hardships, which could build friendship, queer family & love. To know we are not alone, to fight isolation. To create space. To assemble bodies around a table, standing out together in difference.

To assemble a space, lay claim on a house, out of forms of life knowing that they will disappear and reappear, reinvented.

In the absence of a rich communal memory – in part an affect of the turnover of bodies into (and out of) our communities, their (re)

constructions separating generations and identities, and by what was once called 'the tumblization of everyday life', the hope was to claim & purchase something for permanence. As communities with less wealth, lower wages, more precarity, less family (& less inheritance), precarious queer & trans people are used to watching our homes, places of congregation, even our days of celebration, disappear into the ground with the creep of capital, bulldozed &/or rendered to us

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as a spectacular image, no longer representing forms of belonging or sensations of rupture, desire & release that we have needed or continue to need. We know that for things to be fired like the clay work moulded into permanence is potentially to risk the visions of beauty it gives form over time, but we also know that precarity leaves us with little. Even between harm & trauma, even the memories of our own ways of life may disappear, or the contexts of their understanding or in which they are heard may be left threadbare. But our bodies are what we're left with when we walk out, with the knowledge of what working this way may look like, still learning from generous & hard loves, hard work & moments of ease & togetherness, moments of rupture & stress & queer drama. Our bodies worn out, energised, broken, loved, affirmed, held together momentarily, rooted in new friendships, removed from lapsed relationships. The weight carried on our backs, in cardboard & plastic boxes & suitcases drawn out on the mosaic hallway tiles, out of the wooden front door.

But the anxiety & the powerplay & the meetings & the screaming.

Small moments of organisation & shared work & the friendships

built around the table, the relationships, the drama in the dynamics

(eg. butch – femme, abuser – survivor), the play in the present of traumas and deprivations past, the inequalities of wealth & work & the need to not labour. They propose and announce their departure together, a trio of a friend, her girlfriend and herself, co-authoring an email, hiring a van, naïve melodies through a shared ceiling/floor, box supply, climbing the new stairs. However, despite all she had studied with the poets, with S. especially, of the decimation of the Paris Commune, the slaughter of the collective leaving Rimbaud's heart, the cry of the collective-'i' collapsing back into singularity, she wasn't prepared for the first weeks, the sociality (or lack of it), of the new domestic norm – the absence of the shades & sounds of the communal garden, the blue tits & bumble bees straddling each side of her window, the slow rotations of space living, tended, reposed & disposed. The private dwelling was a home made in a smaller ways, not through group emails and accumulations of hours deep cleaning the kitchen in one afternoon. Within it, a new division of socially reproductive labour establishes itself according to need, supply, gender, time, race, mutuality limited by size & location, labour demands, ability, anxiety, education, purchasing power, change, depression. Other anxieties & tensions dissolved with the wooden floorboards of the house that had been left (their rooms occupied by other queers), & a smaller, perhaps richer array in love would substantiate this new home as where she wants to be. & To travel on the back of trauma & time diving into the surface of a wooden table means that I guess I'm already there. The there long dissipated – evicted with a sale at a doubled market value, to be split into quarters for flats, sold off with the revocation of the license of the slumlord who owned the place. Our hands continue to conjure such tables, lifting up our wings even through isolation of necessity, even of

imposition of the right wing state.

Dwell longing to the home abandoned – fragments of love pale /
stretching through the curtains, damp / w/ cries, melodrama,
modernity
& all of where we are pushed
by the call, demand & dispersal of body