

River Marashi Andrew

Content Warnings: transphobia, anti-trans violence, anti-Black violence, death, graphic description of sex, drug use

Floating Above

Bodies and the world collide. Just as we can abstract our bodies to find new meanings, we abstract the world around us to allow us to live. What is it to inhabit a body? We are born into these vessels to experience and move through this world, we are constantly taught how to feel about our bodies and what we are allowed to do to them. The idea that you could be born in the “wrong body,” as for so long has been an umbrella description for trans people and their experience. To say that this is what *all* trans people experience is reductive, dismissive, and harmful. Transness is not a universal experience. *For me there have definitely been times in my life where I felt I was in the wrong body. There have been times where I wanted simply a different body. Lately I have been feeling moments where I am very happy with my body.* Gender dysphoria is nuanced, unnerving, and chaotic. We learn how to reimagine ourselves, how we can change ourselves. We search for gender euphoria. We yearn for ways to feel present in our bodies. We are reimagining what it is to have a body. However, as of 2021, trans youth are being banned from participating in sports, our access to health care, and more. There are 117 anti-trans bills that have been proposed this legislative session. Trans visibility is certainly increasing and with that, the hate is too. It is already incredibly difficult to gain access to gender affirming health care (meaning hormone replacement therapy HRT and medical surgeries that change one’s body). In 2018, there were two bills that banned or restricted gender affirming health care. In

2019 there were four, in 2020 there were 24, and currently in 2021 there are 29.¹ The majority of these bills are aimed at trans youth, sending a purposefully dangerous message that we are not loved, should not have control over our bodies, and simply should not exist. *When I was 8 years old I wanted to transition but thought I would never be able to see my family again and have to move to a different country. This rhetoric has existed for a long time, it is not new. I wasn't able to accept myself as trans until I was 20.* The rules built into access to gender affirming care are set by the World Professional Association of Transgender Health (WPATH). Written as “guidelines,”² they are not designated rules but suggestions for medical practitioners to follow. While medical practitioners are not forced to follow these, however most U.S. practitioners do require patients to meet these requirements. Finding access to HRT is more accessible and places such as Planned Parenthood offer “informed consent” (instead of an individual meeting the requirements outlined in the WPATH, they are informed of what the outcomes of a medical change are and acknowledge any risks that may be involved). These requirements include a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria (from a therapist and/or practicing doctor) letters from therapist(s) and/ or psychiatrist(s) outlining the gender dysphoria of an individual and why a certain medical practice will be of benefit for them. *I had to wait two months for an appointment with a doctor to give me this diagnosis, however with the doctor I was originally recommended I would have had to wait three. It should also be noted that my friend tried to get their HRT from Planned Parenthood and was told the waiting list was over a year long.* Gender dysphoria refers to psychological feelings of disconnect between body and gender, often resulting in dissociation, anxiety, and depression. While gender dysphoria is common among trans and non-binary people, it is not a ‘requirement’ for being transgender and to use it as such is to gatekeep gender and

¹ *This record breaking year for anti-transgender legislation would affect minors the most CNN Maybe I will find a different source but this is just for the purpose of data.*

² WPATH Standards of Care

adhere to the idea that pain must exist as a catalyst for change. *This is what helped me to understand my transness. While I do experience a lot of dysphoria, that came later. What helped me understand my transness was thinking of the euphoria I would experience by changing my body. I just knew that it would make me happy.* Surgeries require more “proof” (*proof is in quotes here because that is the word that the WPATH uses*) than HRT, typically multiple letters from different therapists or psychiatrists are needed and often a year on HRT and a year with “lived experience” (coming out to family and friends, socializing as your “chosen” gender, etc.). This creates a specific path in which trans people must travel down in their physical transition. Requirements such as “lived experience” put trans people at greater physical risk of harm, as is seen through a 266% increase in trans people murdered from January to March of 2021 compared to January to March of 2020 and more than half of these victims are Black trans women.³ The WPATH is gatekeeping access to gender affirming care by requiring a set of rules. Therapists and psychologists are expensive to meet with and to obtain these letters it is often necessary to attend multiple meetings with a mental health professional so as to build a relationship with them as they are not always willing to write a letter after a single meeting. It costs money simply to gain access to HRT and once on it, to maintain the physical changes it produces, it must be taken for the rest of one’s life. The surgeries and HRT are expensive and often require insurance to help with high costs. *My HRT for one month was \$118.* By creating a ‘path,’ the WPATH also creates a binary idea of what transness is. For certain physical changes to be requirements for others, it is assuming that all trans people want all changes possible and does not let us pick and choose how we change our bodies. It views physically transitioning as working to get from one end of the binary to the other and operates under the assumption that all trans people want to look as cisgendered as possible. We are not given the space to be able to

³ *As anti-trans violence surges, advocates demand policy reform* NBC

decide if we want certain physical changes, when we want them, or if we would like to change our minds. The idea of 'de-transitioning' is given a negative view, people who regret their decisions to physically transition are few and far between, and much of the view is that if someone were to stop taking their HRT, it was a 'mistake.' *Recently, Hunter Schafer's Euphoria Special on HBO depicts de-transitioning as an option that is about taking ownership over one's body and not in a negative light.* With "permanent" surgeries come more requirements, often resulting in it taking years to simply gain access to a certain surgery *I tried to get a consultation for vaginoplasty but was told I needed to first provide my letters to appease WPATH standards and was not able to even speak with the doctor.* Permanent surgeries have more requirements because they are irreversible and typically seen as a 'no going back' point. This presentation of gender affirming surgeries is transphobic as it assumes that we don't know what we want and the act of creating requirements to access these is transphobic in it of itself. Gender euphoria is the feeling of elation that is caused by something that makes one feel particularly connected to their gender and happy in their body. This feeling can be caused by a large range of things, including but not limited to: makeup, drugs, clothing, tattoos, sex, art, surgery, and HRT. Gender euphoria is an individual feeling, has a variety of meanings, and is not limited to the physical realm. *Finding gender euphoria is an everyday search for myself, I tend to battle dysphoria everyday, experiencing highs and lows throughout the day. Maybe this has been particularly noticeable lately as my HRT makes my emotions fluctuate on higher levels.* As we prevail in our search for gender euphoria, we discover more and more ways to achieve these feelings of elation. The WPATH words gender affirming health care as a 'solution' to gender dysphoria, making transness sound as if it is an illness. Gender affirming health care, while often does provide gender euphoria, is not the only way to find gender euphoria.

José Muñoz: “Queerness, as I am describing it here, is more than just sexuality. It is this great refusal of a performance principle that allows the human to feel and know not only our work and our pleasure but also our selves and others...the political imagination can spark new ways of perceiving and acting on a reality that is itself potentially changeable.”

Trans and non-binary people are using other methods to find agency over their bodies that allow us to step out of rigid medical praction and into a realm in which we can reimagine our bodies without having to meet legislative requirements. With these methods comes the blurring of the line between what is ‘permanent’ and what is ‘temporary.’ There is no point of arrival when we have agency over our bodies. Through our search for gender euphoria, trans and non-binary people have proven that permanence is a construct.

Romantic relationships often provide us with vessels to explore gender binary and deconstruct our relationship to it. We are provided with countless opportunities such as who pays for bills, who plans events, who pays for meals, who opens the door for who, who fucks who. These are all things we are taught early on in our lives. By feeling how we interact with others we can begin to understand how we feel in relation to the world around us. What gives us pleasure? Sex can be an entry point that helps us understand our gender. Sex is supposed to feel euphoric, however we are told how we are supposed to have sex given our genitals and the gender that was assigned to us at birth. In sexual relationships we can begin to understand our gender and create it, we can use sex as a way to transform ourselves, allowing that sexual relationship to shift how we percieve ourselves.

McKenzie Wark: “She would push me down on her little mattress and encircle my cock as if it was hers...One could say she topped me...I did not feel like her faggot boy. I felt like her faggot girl.”⁴

For most queer people, once we are able to describe ourselves as ‘queer,’ we begin to relive past memories and understand what certain things meant, realizing that we were always queer and in the past have acted with queerness but simply did not have the language to describe it to ourselves. *When I was eight I wanted a machine that could change my body between a ‘mans’ and a ‘womans’ at will. Some twelve years later my dear friend told me that that was a pretty clear indicator that I’m trans.* A feeling without knowing what that feeling is. Looking back in our lives we can queer our past. By recontextualizing moments of queerness before we were queer as always having known it, we are breaking up time. Stating the past as what it truly was is to extend your present self behind you; *it is to hold your eight year old self’s hand and show them the path to the present.*

McKenzie Wark: “Edward’s devouring gaze unmanned me, and I needed that. It did not really matter that he did not see my body the way I did. I saw it as a girl; he saw it as a boy...’When you fuck me I can be my actual girl-self’”⁵

Octavia Butler: “all that you touch you change / all that you change, changes you”⁶
Touch but also feel. To touch that gaze, to feel it, to abstract it, to own it. You can feel it and repurpose it. By abstracting it you hold the power and are able to transform it. It is queering the world around you; turning it into something that works for you. Searching for how to turn moments into long stretches, turning long stretches into a constant. Taking what might one

⁴ *Reverse Cowgirl* McKenzie Wark 41-43

⁵ Wark 82

⁶ Found in *Emergent Strategies: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* by adrienne maree brown, originally from *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler

moment be temporary and the next moment extending it to be more. Gender can start as a performance, a singular action that begins to be repeated until suddenly it's more than just an action but instead, a way of being. A single moment of existing can transcend into an organized future. Or a messy one. We cultivate who we are as we move through life. When we look back and connect the dots, life can fall into place.

Technology disconnects us from reality and provides a way to escape. Maybe to another version of yourself, or maybe to build yourself anew. Technology provides an option for those of us who do not have all the options we want. When we cannot transition in our physical bodies we can transition digitally. With the world full of 'guidelines' for how to transition we can step away from this in another world. Technology can keep us safe when we might otherwise face violence for being trans in the physical world. Videogames are brought to us at an early age, especially for people who are socialized as boys. They are everywhere, so much time is spent in their worlds that they become an extension of ourselves.

Juliana Huxtable: "I ALWAYS PICKED THE GIRLS WHEN I PLAYED VIDEO GAMES. IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN OUT OF SHEER SPITE AT THE EASE OF IDENTIFICATION THE BOYS AROUND ME HAD WITH THEIR UN-INTERESTINGLY PHALLIC/KAMEHAMEHA SUPER-HEROES...WITH THE ASSUMPTION THAT THERE WAS SOME SORT OF INHERENT OR TRAGIC FLAW IN PRINCESS PEACH'S MARIO KART 64 PERFORMANCE, CHUN-LI'S ABSURD CURVES, AND THE CUNT'S MEOW SCREECHING FROM EVERY TURN OF HER HYPER-PORNOGRAPHIC BODY FUELED MY RAGE AGAINST BOYHOOD."⁷

⁷ *Mucus in My Pineal Gland* by Juliana Huxtable "Untitled (For Stewart)" *Parts of Huxtable's book are typeset in all caps, therefore this quote is also set in all caps*

Picking femme characters in videogames is one of those moments of transness before ‘being trans.’ Releasing oneself from gender binary goes hand in hand with breaking division between the physical and digital. *I named my characters River before I named myself River. A digital test-drive that was not intentional, but my subconscious operating my fingers. As I grew closer to understanding and acknowledging my transness, I began picking the ‘female’ option at the start of a new game. I play Zero Suit Samus in Super Smash Bros and Chun-Li when I play Streetfighter II.* Digital worlds allow the subconscious to explore. Through characters we can explore new worlds as different people, fighting masculinity by picking the femme characters is recognizing gender is not fixed. *I didn’t pick being trans, I chose my happiness over safety. I chose to reanimate.* The digital presents an alternative world, an alternative version of self. The digital and physical are ever merging. Music and the use of autotune is an example of how we can manipulate our voices to bring us to new personalities, personas, identities, masks, and genders.

Sasha Geffen: “[the synthesizer is] an extension of the body that enhanced the player’s ability to create...By developing the synthesizer as a musical instrument capable of creating new forms of the voice, Carlos preempted the work that she would do by coming out as a trans woman...When it hits the ear, the voice conveys information about the body from which it issues. Voices have gendered associations...multiple voices, and multiple pitches with identical timbre weave together in Trans-Electronic’s rendering, making the vocoder difficult to gender.”⁸

Carlos uses technology to transition before she begins physically transitioning and starting HRT. This use of technology is not only an extension of her body but an extension of her gender. She was able to use the synthesizer as a way to break down people’s tendency to

⁸ *Glitter Up the Dark* Sasha Geffen 87-88, Carlos and her musical partner Elkind recorded under the label Trans-Electronic Music Productions Inc.

associate a body and gender with voice. To break associations is to break away from the gender binary. She is breaking the plain of time. Technological transitioning can often come before the physical as it is an open playing field of what is possible. Technology can also be used to modify the physical. Imaging provides us the ability to render how we would like to appear, be perceived, or not be perceived.

River Marashi Andrew: “[Hobbes] Ginsberg’s *still alive* is representative of how photography is a trans process by using motifs of construction and metaphors of self within the images herself, the use of multiple selves, and using photography as a way to affirm her existence.”⁹

Ginsberg uses photography as a way to present themselves and how she wants to be perceived. Using imaging technology to present a truthful view of oneself allows for digitally transitioning. Ginsberg has created a full image of herself that she presents to the viewer, it is more than she as a physical being can visually present. Self portraiture allows for more truthful representation of ourselves, without preconceived notions. We present ourselves with our notions of ourselves. We are instructing the viewer on how to perceive us. Or not perceive us. Building a digital persona is becoming even more blurred than ever in 2021. We often meet people’s online personas before their physical one. With the COVID-19 Global Pandemic we are meeting people through our webcams. The self, just like the digital self, is malleable. Nothing is fixed.

Juliana Huxtable: “STEADY SINGULAR LOVE OF MUTABILITY AND
CONTINUAL SHAPE-SHIFTING a la THE CYBORG AS LOVER. A CONSTANT DECAY

⁹ *No Point of Arrival* River Marashi Andrew. I wrote this paper arguing that photography is inherently a trans process and thought it relevant to refer back to while writing this essay. In this essay I also referred to David J. Getsby’s *Ten Queer Theses* and Naomi Scheman’s *Photography and the Politics of Vision*. Getsby writes about abstraction as a tool to resist homophobia and transphobia. Scheman writes about photography as a reflection of how we view the world: “The work is a visual trace of an act of seeing”

AND BIRTH. SOME PIECES ARE PERMANENT, OTHERS EPHEMERAL, DIMINISHING AGAINST THE HORIZON OF OPENNESS AS A PRE-EMPTIVE TO DIVORCE.”¹⁰

We are not indecisive; we simply pick multiple options. Why shouldn't we? We love the water as it ebbs and flows, we are forever. Shape shifting. Plugging out of The Matrix. *Recently one of the creators of The Matrix Series, who is trans, shared that it was in fact an allegory for being trans.*¹¹ *The Matrix is the gender binary and you unplug from it to shape and construct who you are. Apparently Keanu Reeves didn't know this but thinks it's "cool."*¹² We love technology and continue to fuse the physical with the digital. We weave it in with our being, it entralls us and offers the mutability that we so desire. Technology has heightened the blur between what is permanent and what is ephemeral, it bridges our gender desires that are buried within our minds to a more concrete realm; even if that realm is on a screen.

Our bodies are sacred. They are the vessels that allow us to navigate the physical world, to experience sensation, pleasures, physical affection and connection. Bodies can allow us to experience the sensation of home wherever we are. Yet, we have to fight for control over them from external forces. Our bodies are not fixed in our relationship to them nor to their relationship with the outside world. It is a privilege to take your body for granted. To love your body can be an everyday struggle. Have you felt betrayed by your body? Has someone else betrayed yours?. We have to work to regain control, to make our bodies feel like home again.

¹⁰ Huxtable 12

¹¹ *The Matrix is a 'trans metaphor' Lily Wachowski says* BBC

¹² *Huffington Post Keanu Reeves Reacts to 'The Matrix' Being Confirmed as Trans Allegory*

Tamara Santibañez: “Tattooing is a way for those of us who have experienced a loss of control over our bodies, whether that be through life events or because of systematic oppression working against us, to reinstate ourselves as authorities of our own selves.”¹³

I had been dealing with a lot of dysphoria regarding my hair thinning, something that many trans girls deal with but can also get lucky with estradiol and t blockers preventing that, however that was never an effect I experienced. I decided to shave my head and tattoo it to overcome that, probably partly inspired by seeing a mentor of mine’s head tattoo. I asked Sema to tattoo my head, wanting both someone who was trans and therefore have empathy, and someone I’m friends with. Choosing to tattoo my head has been everything I knew it would be, it makes me feel like my body is becoming home.

Tattooing allows us to decorate our flesh homes. They are an extension of self, an extension of feelings and mind matter onto our bodies. Tattoos allow us to feel agency over our bodies, to reclaim them. We are able to use tattooing as a way to mark our bodies as ours again. With both legislative forces and the WPATH altering the way in which we transition, what we have access to, and when we can make choices for our bodies, tattooing can be a way to find physical gender euphoria on our own terms. We are choosing when to alter our bodies, there are no requirements, we are free to do what we like and when we like. *Melody Methakul was the first artist to give me a gender affirming and euphoric tattoo. She tattooed a self portrait of my future self on my left arm and now I am able to look down to remind myself of who I am and how I perceive myself.* Tattooing is a transformative process. It is controlling our perception of ourselves, how others perceive us, and our appearance; tattooing is a way to transition. Transitioning does not have to be what the WPATH states as ways to ‘combat body dysphoria.’

¹³ *Could this be magic? Tattooing as Liberation Work* Tamara Santibañez 17

Not all trans people decide to go on HRT, there is no prescriptive method on ‘how to transition.’ Transitioning is what you make it.

Gossamer Rozen: “I had a double mastectomy...tattoos felt like the same kind of power to transform myself to be who I identify myself to be.”¹⁴

Sema Dayoub: “In terms of gender affirmation, tattooing can be just as life-changing as hormone therapy, electrolysis, or surgery. And compared to the thousands of dollars that a trans-affirming surgery can cost, tattoos are relatively inexpensive and accessible... Tattoos were one of the first tangible ways I ever felt at home in my body.”

Tattoos are a way for us to realize gender euphoria on our own terms with often results that feel just as powerful as surgery. There is a large difference in how these two are carried out. With surgeries one must provide letters and jump through what may feel as endless hoops. Without insurance that covers a large portion of the cost, there is a huge paywall preventing people from getting surgeries, not to mention the privilege alone of having insurance. Tattoos are much more affordable and therefore accessible. Booking appointments does not require proving your transness and wait times are often no more than 3 months depending on the booking system of an artist, in comparison to the years that one may have to wait to get a surgery. Tattooing allows us to feel connected to our bodies: we can accentuate parts of ourselves that we like, reconnect with parts of ourselves we have felt pain with, and decorate ourselves to match our energy.

Sanyu Nicholas: “Tattoos allow you to change how you present yourself in the world, and I think it’s empowering for queer people to define themselves on their own terms,” “Healing and catharsis is what I want for my clients.”

¹⁴ *Getting My Face Tattooed Helps Preserve My Heritage* Gossamer Rozen InkedMag (2:30)

Tattooing's potential for healing is what allows trans people to turn their dysphoria into euphoria. To hold space for an area of one's body that causes dysphoria and to intervene. By decorating parts of ourselves that make us feel out of line with our bodies, we can use tattooing as a method to reconnect and alleviate the pain we experience. Presentation through body ink is the ultimate form of controlling how we are perceived.

Coyote Park: **"FANTASY INTO FLESH**

Pigments of orange to block out shadow.

Black ink drawn to construct new shapes to look out of.

The dull, blunt edge drawn against my skin;
catching hairs dense with regrowth.

Combing through new lengths of brunettes.

There are tools to master shapeshifting:

Hormones are a tool.

Surgeries are a tool.

Voice is a tool.

Hair is a tool.

Clothing is a tool.

Makeup is a tool.

Piercings are a tool.

Tattoos are a tool.

My vessel is a tool.

I am the mechanic.

I am the weaver.

I am the carpenter.

I am the architect.

I will draft,

I will build,

I will deconstruct,

I will rebuild,

I will polish.

I am going to construct a body that I made by myself."

Constructing our bodies in the physical realm is the agency many trans people strive for. After growing up in bodies that make us feel disconnected and estranged, construction is what we can look to as a way to feel at home. Gender fantasies that we discover can help give us direction and are moments in which we can feel a sense of belonging in an idea. Queer people tend to keep people in their hearts as the people that made them realize they were queer in the first place. Their first yearnings, the first people they found attraction to. As trans people we have moments in which we resonate with someone and realize it is not a sexual attraction but a desire to *be* that person. These fantasies help to define who we want to be perceived as and how we perceive ourselves. Our perception of ourselves is the foundation for our self-construction. Tattoos are a way for us to explore this construction, to manifest our energies on our physical forms. By choosing imagery, tattoo styles, colour, placement, artist connection, we can express and embody ourselves.

Ann Cvetkovich: “The term “archive of feelings” puts pressure on traditional notions of the archive because emotional experiences and intimacies are frequently ephemeral and hence not always assumed accessible via the print records and other documents conventionally found in institutionally based archives.”¹⁵

An archive of feelings can be a way for queer people to give power to objects that hold deep personal value, the importance of which may not necessarily be understood by many others. This idea of an “archive of feelings” broadens the possibilities for an archive. What form does an archive take? What makes something an archive?

¹⁵ *Photographing Objects as Queer Archival Practice* Ann Cvetkovich 274

Tamara Santibañez: “Over time, tattoos can create a permanent record of where you’ve been, who you are, and what you’ve done in your life. Tattoos play a significant part in the role of the body as archive.”¹⁶

Our body acts as an archive of feelings. How we change it, how we add to it.. Our flesh homes exist as an archive of feelings, they hold our pain, our love, our dysphoria, our euphoria. Transitioning is archiving how we feel about gender. We are collecting parts of ourselves, new ways to express ourselves, and abstracting our bodies to create anew. Does an archive require specifically being exhibited or does merely existing operate as an archive?

Queerness is devoid of time and space. We can move effortlessly from one to the next, pirouetting on a tightrope. Time is not linear for the queer body, for the trans body. We reanimate ourselves, sculpting our own bodies, flitting between chrysalis and flight.

T Fleischmann: “I distrust linearity, but our bodies can seem like one of the only linear things-age, getting bigger and then smaller, death. Another reason to appreciate the transitioning body, which ages backward, every person seeming to become younger, with or without taking hormones. It’s a good reminder that the body was never linear in the first place.”

HRT is starting a second childhood. Instead, we are thrown into a new adulthood, but why can’t we still be kids? Living a second childhood rooted in agency and care, feeling connected to our bodies instead of listening to their constant cries. What would that feel like? The “transitioning body,” is one that ebs and flows, always changing. Transitioning or de-transitioning and then transitioning again to the point where those words melt away. There is no linearity in that but the certainty that it will forever change.

¹⁶ “Tattoos play a significant part in the role of the body as archive” is from a conversation had by artist Rafa Esparza. This quote appears in *Could this be Magic? Tattooing as Liberation Work* by Tamara Santibañez

Juliana Huxtable: “I AM A PLAYER > SWITCHING BETWEEN 1ST AND 3RD PERSPECTIVE”¹⁷

I simply like this as an allegory that could be used for dissociation, whether that is her intention I am not sure, much of her writing is above me and for once I appreciate that.

Switching perspectives. A way to try to understand yourself, your transness. Switching to 3rd person and seeing how you can perceive yourself, how certain changes might feel. Can you feel what is not there? Can you feel what you want to be there? *Sometimes I imagine what it will be like to have my future vagina. Sometimes I can feel it. I remember being a lot younger and trying to imagine what having a vagina would feel like too.* How can we learn what is right for our bodies?

adrienne maree brown: “A visionary exploration of humanity includes imagination.”¹⁸

Imagination 4 Transness. We feel what is not yet there, we desire for what is to come. We imagine, we describe, we create. Imagination is essential to our existence. Not because we are imaginary, but because we imagine our future, our future bodies, where our bodies will take us and where we will take them.

Juliana Huxtable: “The referential expanse of how I self-imagine unpacks at a deliberate pace, avoiding any parody of the bodies I grow proximate to, ‘real women.’”¹⁹

This idea of being able to “self-imagine” encapsulates the idea of imagining a future body, imagining to create your body, imagining to aid in transitioning. Creating, but not along the binary, pushing further than the options laid out for us. Avoiding imitation of ‘real women’ and creating something more. Our imagination will lead us to what is right for our bodies but we must also listen to them as well. Our emotions are set in skin. We have the ability to experiment,

¹⁷ Huxtable 165

¹⁸ *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* adrienne maree brown 17

¹⁹ Huxtable 41

to continuously change until we have past the initial options that we once thought were the only options. We move past the binary.

Sasha Geffen: “In ‘The Language of the Future,’ she’s a woman playing a man imitating the futuristic lingo of a teenage girl. The gender of her performance flips back and forth until it’s hard to trace where the one ends and the zero begins. The ironic, playful future Anderson constructs is a prismatic one, where identities can flit from body to body, and where the sanctity binary modes of preordained identity falls into flux.”²⁰

Switching “back and forth” is to distance oneself from the binary entirely. The binary is constructed around permanence, there is no room to move. An individual is assigned to be a one or a zero and must stay there. Switching between the two is against the core of the binary, the core being permanence. With permanence in flux, there is no more binary, the closer to the ephemeral the further one is from the idea of binary. A system’s ability to regulate can be broken. This artistic exploration may be in a single song but it is imitating life..

McKenzie Wark: “I could slip between genders, shimmy past masculinity for a moment, but not really launch into another gender. It was more a euphoria of lofting out of gender for a moment, composing some other body outside gender’s gravity. To non-exist in a non-existing gender, to float a femme phantasmagoria of skins and signs.”²¹

Non-existence is not to be imaginary, but to not be perceived. To exist on another plane, to rid yourself of the weight of gravity. Non-existence is to control dissociation. Finding gender euphoria by floating out of the binary is to rid oneself of permanence. To take it further and stay outside of the binary, to continue non-existing is to do away with permanence all together.

²⁰ Geffen (97) Geffen writes about Anderson’s music

²¹ Wark 96

Sul Mousavi: “My beef with the word nonbinary is less in the word itself than in its usage and context: it’s used like a third gender and like an identity...I would say it’s more of a dispossession-because it relinquishes some essential tenet of identity-as well as a reclamation...However, all of this is predicated on Western grammars of liberation and gender understanding... ”nonbinary” to me is a specific practice and ethical position, but one that I acknowledge is not transnational or a perfect solution.”²²

Sul Mousavi: “My mind is the vessel and my body is the message.”²³

I intended on writing a fifth body paragraph on the idea of “no arrival point,” the idea that as trans and non-binary people, we do not [have to] arrive at a gender, a body, a form. We simply exist. We do not have to work towards a certain idea of ourselves or towards a binary idea set by cis people. There does not have to be a point of arrival. This ‘paragraph’ will act as simply a bridge to another discussion that is relevant to this topic, this idea of “no arrival point” has already come up in this paper, this is simply a direct calling. There is no arrival point.

Permanence is a construct intertwined with the gender binary. As trans and non-binary people we transcended these constructs, we stretch the ephemeral of gender euphoria to create a stage for our being. It starts with these moments of transness before we have the vocabulary to describe ourselves, our being, our gender(s). We look back on this and stretch our present selves back to our past, we hold the hands of our past selves and walk them to our present and future. We connect on all plains of time. Technology can provide us with an outlet to begin placing feelings from mind to digital. The digital space allows us to explore in a semi-physical realm, reaching in ways in which our mind cannot quite touch. The digital provides an opportunity to

²² Rob Mousavi in conversation with River Marashi Andrew, taken from an artist statement written by River on photographs made of Rob by River.

²³ Mousavi in conversation

explore the subliminal, we can begin transitioning even if we do not realize it yet, we can explore transness when it is not yet safe or possible. We can begin to understand our perceptions of ourselves. Creating digital versions of our transness. Exploring gender through the bodies of fictional femmes, using the digital to begin to feel what is right. We dissociate to create new bodies, floating above the ones and zeros, we remove ourselves. Our bodies, our skin homes, provide us opportunities to transition without restrictions. Finding ways to physically transition without ‘medicine.’ To take it upon ourselves, use our own energy, to use our bodies to change themselves. We “self-imagine,” we create ourselves. *Transness is bigger than my eight-year-old-self could have ever imagined. I never knew I could do this.*

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