Transsexual as Posthuman: Approaching Trans Studies' "Narrative Problem" through Trans and Posthumanist Genres

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Abstract

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"Transsexual as Posthuman" uses critical and narrative frameworks for trans studies and trans narratives as critiqued in Andrea Long Chu and Emmett Harsin Drager's 2019 article "After Trans Studies." With a focus on the role of the transsexual figure in postmodernity—and the haunting of Sandy Stone's neologism "posttranssexual" therein—I analyze how satire, genre blending, dystopia, and the tagline "writing optimism without hope" may drive trans narratives present and future. I also argue that these tactics intertwine not only with trans, but with decolonial and extinction narratives as well. With persistent reference back to my own MFA creative thesis project, *Inside Waters: Killer Whale Stories*, I also analyze these tactics in Emily Zhou's "Gen Z trans" realistic fiction short story collection *Girlfriends* (2023) and Lousie Erdrich's Indigenous feminist dystopia *Future Home of the Living God* (2017).

Transsexual as Posthuman: Approaching Trans Studies' "Narrative Problem" through Trans and Posthumanist Genres

In 1998, Susan Stryker claimed that the transsexual figure exists at a locus of disruption, a phenomenon which "emerge[s] from and bear[s] witness to the epistemological rift between gender signifiers and their signifieds [sexes]. In doing so, they disrupt and denaturalize Western modernity's 'normal' reality, specifically the fiction of unitary psychosocial gender that is rooted biologically in corporal substance." (147). Stryker is in conversation with Jean-François Lyotard's conceptualization of postmodernity in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984). She is particularly concerned with postmodernism "in a generally historicist sense […] as a shorthand notation to describe certain cultural conditions within transnational technoscientific capitalism" (155). In her analysis, Stryker critiques not only cissexual theorists' appropriation of the transsexual as a figure (it was, of course, Jean Baudrillard who used the transsexual as a metaphorical device to illuminate his dissatisfaction with postmodernity), but also of the rising metadiscourse within 1990s transgender, transsexual, and queer activist communities. Stryker claims that these terms—transgender, transsexual, and queer—"have become hopelessly tangled in subsequent attempts to carry out the critical project I understand [Sandy] Stone to have envisioned with her neologism 'posttranssexual'" (148). She continues, speculating, "To a large extent, work in transgender studies will consist of definitional wrangling until a better consensus emerges of who deploys these terms, in what contexts, and with what intent" (Stryker 148).

Indeed, this is exactly what Andrea Long Chu, over twenty years later, would identify as trans studies' "narrative problem": "The big secret about trans studies is that its working definition of *trans* is just 'queer, again'" (Chu and Harsin Drager 105). In approaching my thesis project, I have asked myself, how do I avoid reiterating this problem? How do I keep from

tangling linguistic terms even more hopelessly rather than definitionally wrangling them alongside my transfeminist colleagues? How should I delineate between disruptions? Does any trans disruption move beyond the narrative problem, or are some—many, most—simply queer, again? I will not wrangle with all of Stryker's terms directly, but rather, after answering my own questions here, I will return to *transsexual* and consider it alongside Sandy Stone's *posttranssexual*—which, in its thirty-five years of use, has exemplified much of the tension between Stryker's terms and, certainly, Chu's narrative problem.

Throughout this essay (as well as in my creative manuscript), I have followed closely the recommendations and critiques Andrea Long Chu and Emmett Harsin Drager make in the 2019 dialogue "After Trans Studies." Though Chu and Harsin Drager often focus on the narratives of trans studies as a research topic, I have taken their recommendations to consider the fictional and autofictional narratives within my own writing and in analysis of other fictional works. This analysis begins with archetypal genre: "I am much more interested in a satire, a genre about how truly disappointing and sometimes even boring it is to be a trans person," Harsin Drager writes (104). Chu continues, "Bitterness feels right to me as one of the primary critical affects of trans satire as we're imagining it here—not cynicism, which is a way of titrating bitterness until you can't taste it anymore, but real bitterness, the bitter disappointment of finding out the world is too small for our desires, and especially the political ones" (106).

This gesture is also a response to disruption—there is little more disappointing than having a certain expectation of transition, of the future, of relationality with wild animals and being stripped of the agency to self-determine each embodiment and relation. This has become especially prevalent to me as I have responded in my writing, directly or indirectly, to world events and those closer to home—Palestinian genocide and attempted Korean coups; Thai

legalization of gay marriage and increased access to hormone-replacement therapy; West Coast winter wildfires and Gulf Coast blizzards; the slew of executive orders, grant cancellations, and governmental restructurings during the first several months of President Trump's second term. My work as a writer has become increasingly political in response to these and countless other news stories over the past year. And, in the simplest way, disruption appears again and again in the creative manuscript: when Audrey comes out and "One day, [she] was a boy who was almost a man, and the next, [she] was just a woman" while waiting in unprecedented Southern Resident-less times (Mallory 7); when Beatrix is faced with the oil spill at the same time as her family reels from her transition (Mallory 150-51); when Niamh must contend with her loneliness in the wake of the Fertility Crisis, the birth of her father's child, and the life/death of the calf J171 (Mallory 131-46). Each of these instances represents the disruption between an idealized future and a painfully real one, while also tapping into each character's (and my own) bitter affect.

Narrative and genre disruptions are as important in my writing as disruptions to my characters' lives. I move between genres, have an aversion to clarify or accept just one. In "Return," for instance, the novum is not a technological advent, but it is rather an *absence*, the disappearance of the whales (Mallory 1-18). This reversion of a long-standing tradition in speculative fiction (sf) is itself disrupted with Audrey's coming out narrative, one in which she is given perhaps too much agency; the two are braided together as she searches the island for the whales and for stability in her identity. These genre disruptions are representative of transness, sure, but also of the Southern Residents' path toward extinction, of the broader ecological crisis inherent to settler-colonialism, late-stage capitalism, and globalization.

This disruption is rooted in feminist genre studies. For sf scholar Raffaella Baccolini, feminist manipulations of genre conventions are "an oppositional strategy, a site of resistance

against hegemonic ideology that, among other things, sees women and other marginalized groups linked with deviance and inferiority" ("Gender and Genre" 15). Later in the essay, I'll consider Baccolini while analyzing feminist sf. I will begin my literary analysis, however, with a text of realistic fiction which lays the groundwork for these disruptions as uniquely trans while also discoursing (nearly thirty years on) about those terms Stryker views as "tangled."

Disruption of Transition in Emily Zhou's Girlfriends

In her 2023 short story collection *Girlfriends*, Emily Zhou questions the agency of her characters to define their own sexualities and relationships to the trans women and (usually cis) men around them. In "Performance," Lara questions her lesbianism while toying with a cis man who has interest in her, while in "Ponytail," Veronica leverages her relationships with men—cis and trans—to judgmentally diminish other characters' transition choices. As I'll analyze, Lara's behavior in "Performance" showcases the tension of her newfound social contract and disrupts (without subverting) the power structures between her and the male characters, while in "Ponytail," Veronica takes on the role of disruptor as she navigates (in)ability to access transition. I'll close with an analysis of the transfeminine characters as representative of *transsexual* or *posttranssexual* in line with their political motivations throughout each story.

"Performance" begins with Lara attending a housewarming party: her friend's fiancé Kenny is returning to Ann Arbor after spending a year in Europe. Having not seen her since she began transition, Kenny displays interest in Lara, "checking her out in the boring, unsubtle, chauvinistic way that men do to women, to size them up and, possibly, stimulate later fantasy" (Zhou 29). This attraction is an imposition that dominates the rest of their conversations together, especially as Lara considers what this new male attention might mean for her. Later, talking

alone in the kitchen, Kenny frustrates Lara by awkwardly skirting around her sexuality, and when she attempts to escape the situation, "Lara walked past him and touched his shoulder with her fingertips, held it there for just a little longer than he could ignore" (Zhou 32). Lara therefore mirrors Kenny's heterosexuality while simultaneously denying her own queerness. This is a performance, one which seems confusing before considering womanhood as defined by heterosexuality and a compulsorily innate attraction to men. Indeed, what is womanhood if not performing heterosexuality? Kenny instigates such compulsion first by checking Lara out and later by cornering her and questioning her sexuality. For, as lesbian feminist Adrienne Rich describes in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," such female heterosexuality is manifested via male power: "The ideology of heterosexual romance, beamed at her from childhood out of fairy tales, television, films, advertising, popular songs, wedding pageantry, is a tool ready to the procurer's hand and one which he does not hesitate to use" (645). For Lara, such heterosexuality only comes naturally to her. This isn't a test of Kenny's engagement or a test of her own sexuality, but rather a compulsion based on society's expectation of women.

Such heterosexuality is complicated by Lara's transness. As transfeminist Agepa Christie explains, "compulsory heterosexuality amongst trans women does not operate in the same way as it does for cis women. No. That would be ridiculous. It is more extreme, like all manner of misogynies are, for trans women." More extreme, yes, in the removal of Lara's lesbian agency, but also more complicated. "Male attention wasn't new to her," the narrator claims, "the mostly mocking catcalls and leers had begun immediately after she transitioned. This was a scrambled up form of it, though, hard to parse even on the subtextual frequencies that came easier to her now. What did he want? Was this normal? Men valued eye contact in each other, didn't they? *Eye contact and a firm handshake*, Lara's father always reminded her" (Zhou 29). The middle-class

American expectation of male-male camaraderie—compulsory cissexuality—is muddling with the middle-class American expectation of male-female compulsory heterosexuality. Lara, therefore, is playing with Kenny's emotions because of the mixed social cues she was taught when expected to act as a man and those she internalized from her position as a woman. Christie describes such muddling through Ray Blanchard's theories of transsexuality, comparing the straight trans woman (the "homosexual transsexual," or HSTS) with the bi/gay trans woman (the "autogynephile," or AGP): "HSTS is a performance for which AGP is its failstate and, as such, it becomes the vessel for the sins of trans womanhood," she writes, "This is, of course, a typology of compulsory heterosexuality. A regime, even" (Christie). Lara's disruption of the narrative is a nonnormative attempt at normativity, even if such normativity is inherently compulsory and reinforced by "the regime," as Christie calls it.

That Lara's disruption of cis-heterosexuality appears in this way is the same reason for which I've chosen to cite Adrienne Rich, though many feminists have written off her writings and activism as trans- and sex worker-exclusive. In "Compulsory Heterosexuality," Rich cites such anti-trans and anti-porn feminists as Mary Daly, Catharine A. MacKinnon, and Andrea Dworkin, and Rich herself is cited in Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire*, the trans-exclusive radical feminist ür-text. However, as transfeminist Talia Bhatt claims of Daly and Raymond, "Radical feminism saw the most definitive real-world proof of its own theories in the transsexual, and sought to destroy her instead of embracing her" (152). Bhatt's essay "The Question Has an Answer"—the conclusion to her first book *Trans/Rad/Fem*, released while I revised my thesis project—argues something I've felt for a while about TERF texts, and which I feel Zhou is approaching in Lara and Kenny's interactions:

> In these texts, I found the language to describe my own making and unmaking. From their words, I forged the fury of my own purpose. They were, in their own day, at their best, brilliant and brave women.
>
> And they still abandoned their own ideals out of sheer disgust.
>
> Look upon our faces, and see the truth none of you were able to bear. (152)

As well as Rich's cis-focused compulsory heterosexuality describes Lara's actions in "Performance" (even if Rich and her contemporaries would have deemed Lara "male"), it is her transness that expands upon the compulsory heterosexuality she faces, disrupts heterosexuality while simultaneously reifying it.

Behind this disruption of plot and sexuality, Lara's research builds upon her performance of womanhood and, perhaps, explains her insistence on remaining within the "indoctrination of male credibility and status" (Rich 646). As a junior at the University of Michigan, Lara is studying English, writing in her undergraduate thesis about performativity in Henry James novels. Lara's foil in this story, Tess, another trans lesbian with an "anxious, motherly attachment" to Lara (for the mother-daughter connection is an archetypal alternative to compulsory heterosexuality, according to Rich), stands as a bitter figure who resents Lara's experimentation with men and is particularly critical of Lara's research (Zhou 27). "Lara's pretending to be a feminist theorist," Tess tells Kenny at the party, "She's gonna figure out what it means to be a woman once and for all" (Zhou 33). Kenny doesn't understand, and after Lara flounders to explain, Tess jumps in again:

> Gender is, on some level, just performance, because we all do things to indicate to the world that we are the gender we are. The existence of trans people—people who perform gender in, like, "wrong" or "marked" ways—are a way for people to say gender is *only* a

> performance. But it's a really cheap way to do it, because it ends up letting cis people off the hook, even if it's meant to call the whole system into question. (Zhou 34)

The inclusion of gender studies discourse in a story titled "Performance" which itself questions the ability of the lesbian protagonist to determine her own relationship with men reminds the audience of the particular "marked" ways in which the characters are performing in daily life. Tess further positions Lara as a "fake" feminist for uncritically subscribing to performance theory while Tess is placed as a "real" feminist for criticizing the theory. Within the plot, then, Lara's compulsory flirting with Kenny despite her lesbianism—a veritable *performance*, the HSTS performance "for which AGP is its failstate" (Christie)—is problematized, while Tess' insistence on decentering men as Rich suggests is "more" feminist.

The figure of the posttranssexual exists as a clear response to performance theory: The posttranssexual "urges us to tell our stories differently from the medicalized transsexual, establishing at the very foundation of trans studies the disavowal of the transsexual. And trans scholars have been myopically preoccupied with proving that we are no longer *that* ever since" (Chu and Harsin Drager 106). Tess' rejection of performance theory is also a rejection of the transsexual as simply an appropriated figure that "proves" gender roles. If the transsexual proves performance, "ends up letting cis people off the hook" while still seeking normativity, then the posttranssexual dives headfirst into performativity; in coining the posttranssexual, Stone asks the transsexual to "forgo passing, to be consciously 'read,' to read oneself aloud" (299). Lara, in this case, performing femininity via compulsory heterosexuality, aligns closer with the transsexual figure, while Tess, in critique of such performance, aligns closer with the posttranssexual in what Chu and Harsin Drager describe as the urge "to tell our stories differently" and a preoccupation "with proving that we are no longer *that*" (106). I understand the desire to separate oneself from

such narrow categories into which performance theory often shoves trans people (especially colonized and racialized trans people), but such a movement—which Chu and Harsin Drager describe in both Stone's and Donna Haraway's writings as not just post-transsexual, but also "post-woman" (109)—seems to be detrimental to the agency which transsexuality grants. In fact, just as I have had difficulty analyzing how Tess can both reject performativity and yet still critically approach it herself, Chu and Harsin Drager find similar contradictions in Stone's writing. Posttranssexual, Chu claims, is not "some authentic truth about the way it really feels to be transsexual," but rather, a "molding [of Stone's] object to fit her theory" (110). This in turn furthers "the long-standing intellectual move in which the trans person, just through the act of existing, becomes a kind of living incubator for *other people's* theories of gender" (Chu and Harsin Drager 110). Similarly, while Tess rightly points out that Lara's performance relies on cisheteropatriarchal norms, Tess herself fails to see her own argument as supporting that which she decries. This slippage between the politics of the transsexual and the posttranssexual—as well as the posttranssexual's self-sabotage—becomes a major aspect of my analysis, then, as I attempt to wrangle these terms in my own writing and in Zhou's and other transfeminist writings.

These questions of performativity and trans girls' narrative agency about their own transition continue in Zhou's short story "Ponytail." Veronica, a poor writer working as a barista in New York City and the only trans girl in her friend group, attends a party with Ambrose, a trans guy who she dated before either of them transitioned. At the party, Veronica meets Tristan and Esmé, newly out trans lesbians whom Veronica mentally misgenders and disparages, thinking, "There's only so much you can do with clothes and makeup, but some people aren't even trying" (Zhou 137). Tristan and Esmé here are not performing femininity to Veronica's standards, read as "dykey" and non-passing and therefore rejecting the traditional trans-as-

performative theory. Their decision to be openly read aligns them closer with the posttranssexual, while Veronica's derision of their visible trans lesbianism and desire to help them pass draws her closer to the transsexual.

As in "Performance," Veronica's proximity to men in "Ponytail" further determines her interactions with the trans women in the story. After Tristan and Esmé make fun of Ambrose's voice and Veronica expresses discomfort, Tristan asks, "Oh my god. Are we being mean?"

"He's an abusive shithead, I don't care," Esmé said.

> "Yeah," Tristan agreed. "How've you been, V?" Tristan said.
>
> I reached out and snatched the weed pen from her hand as she was in the middle of making some stupid gesture with it, and then I went back inside without saying anything.
>
> The word *abusive* had completed the picture for me—*that* was what justified the gross, transphobic way they felt empowered to talk about him. Was it possible they were thinking about *me*, that those girls believed they were saying all that on *my* behalf. I didn't really know where that story had ended up in the endless game of telephone that the "trans community" played with other peoples' lives.
>
> The other possibility, that those girls knew something I didn't, and that he had caused some hurt somewhere outside of the people in this room, was significantly worse. (Zhou 139)

Veronica's monologue here calls back to her relationship with Ambrose, years ago, before either of them were out, when they had become codependent and fought regularly, amounting in Ambrose stabbing Veronica in the arm with a fountain pen and their inevitable (though ugly) breakup (Zhou 130-31). Having already been judgmental of Tristan and Esmé, their discussion of

Ambrose, whom Veronica still considers herself close to, drives a further wedge between the characters. And while there is never any certainty about whether it was Ambrose's run-in with Veronica that leads the girls to label him "abusive," what I think pisses off Veronica the most about it is that Tristan and Esmé's reductive labelling strips her of agency to tell her own narrative about the relationship. Especially since she's already on edge about their sexuality—about their insistence to get away from compulsory heterosexuality, while Veronica is placed constantly in relation to men—she searches for any reason to be more critical of them. While this is directly a positioning of trans lesbianism against trans heterosexuality, it is also a positioning of varying performativities: one which plays with gender and sexual performance and one which approaches the heterosexual norm even as Veronica's and Ambrose's transness subverts it.

Later on, the roles are reversed for Veronica. While contemplating her relationship to Ambrose, Veronica approaches a straight couple she doesn't recognize—the girl, Arabelle, being "the most interesting person I had seen all night" (Zhou 140)—and follows them out the front of the house to smoke. While they smoke, Veronica overhears the couple talking about Arabelle's upcoming surgery. "*Surgery*," Veronica narrates, "Oh, got it. If her face hadn't given her away, her voice would have" (Zhou 141). Veronica again resorts to clocking and judging Arabelle, turning away from her complimentary comments just moments before, although as opposed to Tristan and Esmé, Arabelle is perhaps even more transsexual than Veronica for her ability to access surgery (not to mention her heterosexuality). As opposed to the queerness of Tristan and Esmé, it is Arabelle's proximity to normativity that threatens Veronica here.

In this scenario, Veronica has lost the upper hand. Arabelle is farther along in her transition and has the social and financial capabilities for surgery, something which—despite maxing out her credit cards on clothes—is inaccessible to Veronica. She is at first interested to be

in the company of someone who, unlike Tristan and Esmé, "seemed genuinely indifferent to the polite atmosphere of solidarity 'we' are supposed to have," but then decides to be a little mean once she realizes that "she was wearing like, at minimum, fifteen hundred dollars worth of clothes while talking about writing a dissertation" (Zhou 142). Veronica tells Arabelle, "One thing about [the surgeon] is that he gives all the girls the same nose," which then begins a conversation between Veronica and Arabelle's partner about cis women's nose jobs, the man concluding, "It's always, y'know, at risk of sounding insensitive, the white ethnics who do it […] Like the Italians and Eastern Europeans. Like, *they don't fit into conventional beauty standards either*" (Zhou 142-43; emphasis mine). The emphasized line, following a conversation which downplays and critiques Arabelle's choice for surgery, highlights not only the uncomfortable differences and similarities between cis and trans women's plastic surgeries but also a wedge of space in which Veronica is able to belittle Arabelle without the cis guy knowing. It's almost as if a language only understandable to trans women, one which critiques class but also directly therefore critiques transition. Veronica (and unwittingly, Arabelle's boyfriend) take on the role of the posttranssexual in this scene: Arabelle's nonnormative attempts at normativity are 1) made normative in comparison to rich, white, cosmopolitan women, and 2) made to seem unnecessary, cosmetic. Veronica then embraces nonnormativity and decries normative attempts.

Arabelle stands up for herself, saying, "I don't appreciate the way you're talking to me," but Veronica gets in one last retort:

> "Once you get surgery," I said, keeping my voice even, "you'll be able to wear your hair in a ponytail like that more often."
>
> "Excuse me?" she said.

> "The brow ridge, you know," I said casually, tossing my cigarette butt into the sidewalk. "You won't have to worry about it."
>
> "Alright, I'm going inside," Arabelle said.
>
> "Cool, I'll see you in there," I said.
>
> She wasn't going to give me the satisfaction of untying her hair in front of me, but I was sure she'd do it once she was inside. I wondered if she was gonna run into those Discord transbians. (Zhou 144)

This conversation about the eponymous "Ponytail" is the climax of Veronica's misogynistic remarks, portraying exactly how she projects transphobic expectations of passing and presentation onto Arabelle in much the same way as she did onto Tristan and Esmé. She in fact brings them back up in these final lines, relegating them to "Discord transbians"—chronically online, with politically charged sexualities. I am reminded of Veronica's earlier comments about solidarity, believing at first that Arabelle cared little for solidarity, now only able to find safety among explicitly transfeminist women. This fact is doubled when Ambrose anxiously approaches Veronica, asking if she wants to leave. She declines, sending him back inside—the implication being that there, he will be surrounded by transfeminists who have labeled him "abuser"—before immediately going home with Arabelle's boyfriend (Zhou 145). Once protective over Ambrose, Veronica leaves him in favor of the cis man who she used as a wedge to drive between herself and the other trans women at the party.

And yet, through all this, I still haven't answered my earlier questions about how exactly to deal with these disruptions—transsexual and posttranssexual—in meaningfully political ways.

Transsexual vs Posttranssexual: Gender Norms and Genre Conventions

I return, then, to Chu and Harsin Drager's dialogue and positing of the trans satire. Chu continues this notion, considering that trans satire is "not rejecting narration as such (which is impossible), but trying to learn how to write without optimism, or maybe how to be optimistic without being hopeful" (Chu and Harsin Drager 106). What is typically optimistic for trans studies is the posttranssexual, Sandy Stone's term which Stryker understood to be the inception of the trans studies critical project. The posttranssexual "urges us to tell our stories differently from the medicalized transsexual, establishing at the very foundation of trans studies the disavowal of the transsexual. And trans studies scholars have been myopically preoccupied with proving that we are no longer *that* ever since" (Chu and Harsin Drager 106). This is the position from which I entered into queer feminism in my late-teens—this myopic obsession with proving myself as posttranssexual. As an undergraduate, I identified as nonbinary (or genderqueer, or genderfuck, depending on the day) and used they/them pronouns; I had anxieties about whether I should in fact be taking hormones or not because, from the perspective of the posttranssexual, HRT reaffirms the gender binary and acts in opposition to feminist and decolonial attempts to dismantle it. (How ironic, I think now, that while the transsexual supposedly proves the gender binary, in its disavowal of medical transition, the posttranssexual attempts to destroy it.) These identifications and anxieties stemmed from a political urge for just that: destruction of the gender binary. I felt that if being transsexual would prove or uphold the binary, it wasn't worth being trans in that way. Choosing to identify with something I am not for political reasons was not satisfying and was antithetical to the trans studies project. At least in my case, it was also a removal of a woman's agency to make choices about her own body.

Harsin Drager says, "For me, this project of incessantly trying to prove that we are no longer the medicalized transsexual is the very place where trans studies has lived and will die. It is an obsession with resistance and radicality that has severely limited our ability to fully understand trans pasts and presents" (Chu and Harsin Drager 107). While there is certainly a relevancy to write toward the posttranssexual optimism, especially considering Stryker's invocation of the posttranssexual as the future of trans studies, it is a limiting frame. Chu explains, "And it's no accident, I'd add, that the transsexual is the only thing that *trans* can describe that *queer* can't. The transsexual is not queer; this is the best thing about her" (Chu and Harsin Drager 107). If I am to take trans studies seriously, I must return, then, to the transsexual. In more recent years, I have changed my understanding of my gender—now identifying as a trans woman (as Chu reminds us of the transsexual, "paradigmatically she *is* a she")—and have grown in my conception of the mechanisms of gender and sex both within myself and within the broader late capitalist and settler colonial paradigm (Chu and Harsin Drager 109). This is not to say that transfeminism is something that only trans women or only binary trans people can adopt; my crossing of genders simply reflects my changing political motivations. In writing both my creative manuscript and my critical essay, then, I glibly take a card from Baudrillard's book and consider the transsexual as a metaphor for my notion of gender, sexuality, and animal alterity.

But, wait a moment. What about the bending of genres? How is that figured into the transsexual; isn't it the realm of the posttranssexual? For Stone, the trans body is "a genre—a set of embodied texts" (296), and in coining the posttranssexual, she asks the transsexual to "forgo passing, to be consciously 'read,' to read oneself aloud" (299). Chu and Harsin Drager therefore see posttranssexuality as "an intertextuality, a multiplicity of genres" (106). This falls in line with Raffaella Baccolini's claims about feminist genre blending. One must remember, however, that

the transsexual—for both Baudrillard and Stryker—has her own intertextual and disrupting qualities. Thus, Camille Nurka claims, “the transsexual body occupies a paradoxical position as one that is unnaturally reconstructed in order to generate a natural effect” (217). The transsexual is always already a cyborg and yet remains abject “woman” not because of some teleological fixity but seemingly ontologically. “Womanhood,” Talia Bhatt writes, “is a social positionality constructed through misogynistic violence and sexual-reproductive exploitation, and no case confirms this more than the transsexual woman, whose ‘male anatomy’ does not spare her in the slightest” (152). The transsexual figure is simultaneously a location of normative movement and paradigm disruption.

Chu explores this paradox through the case of Agnes, “the pseudonymous trans woman who famously posed as intersex at UCLA’s Gender Identity Clinic in the late fifties in order to obtain a vaginoplasty” (Chu and Harsin Drager 107). While many trans studies scholars read Agnes’ posing as a self-aware attempt to prove the innateness of gender and sexual normativity, Chu believes Agnes actually reveals that “Norms, as such, *do not exist*” (Chu and Harsin Drager 107). “That doesn’t mean that norms don’t structure people’s desires,” Chu writes, “what it means is that the desire for the norm consists, in terms of its lived content, in *nonnormative* attempts at normativity. Agnes was a nonnormative subject, but that wasn’t because she was ‘against’ the norm; on the contrary, her nonnormativity was what wanting to be normal actually looked like” (Chu and Harsin Drager 107). This draws me back to Chu’s earlier claim about the transsexual not being queer—Agnes’ posing as intersex in order to get “what she actually wanted: a cunt, a man, a house” reveals this driving force of perceived norms within transsexual desires (Chu and Harsin Drager 107). It further resonates with Stryker’s critique of postmodernism’s “empiricist theory of representation in which representation is conceived as

'the reproduction for subjectivity of an objectivity that lies outside it'" (147). Transsexual narratives, then, showcase "nonnormative attempts at normativity."

Here is where I place Lara and Veronica from Zhou's writing. Both follow a transsexual narrative that align with Chu's consideration of Agnes' "nonnormative attempts at normativity." The compulsory heterosexuality Lara faces may in fact be a major part of how these norms drive her desires; Veronica's critiques first of "Discord transbians" Tristan and Esmé portray how their desires are mismatched with hers, but her discomfort with Arabelle represents how she cannot even reach her own desires. Both are a certain *disappointment*, another key word I've drawn from Chu and Harsin Drager's writing. This is a disappointment, I feel, that comes from recognizing that one's desires may never be realized—in my own creative thesis, this is central to Niamh's trans experience in "Death Drive" and Zoë's relationship to the whales throughout "Apocalypse." What I like about Lara and Veronica as characters, despite being anti-heroes who are seemingly critiqued by the rest of the cast and the stories as a whole, is that they both lean into such disappointments: rather than diving headfirst into performance theory (or in fact denying it), they recognize their desires and cling to them completely.

If Lara and Veronica are anti-heroes—transmisogynistic assholes, even—who deny and negate the other characters' trans politic, do these normative attempts lead us anywhere productive? Is there optimism without hope somewhere inside them, something which we can extract from fiction and into the real world without becoming assholes ourselves? This is where I, again, return to the trans satire. My satire is not always the scathing, on-the-nose reconfigurations of fascist politics, as with Alison Rumfitt's trans body horror satire *Brainwyrms* (2023) or Vera Drew's trans DC Comics satire *The People's Joker* (2024). My trans satire draws on these impulses, but with a greater focus on that disappointment, on the affect of being

disappointed, and, perhaps crucially, runs parallel to other constellated disappointments which I have not satirized—namely, the inevitable extinction of the Southern Resident killer whales.

Harsin Drager connects trans narrative to decolonial and anti-colonial narrative, critiquing the uses of several archetypal genres, writing,

> while romance, a genre about triumph, was necessary for anti-colonial resistance, tragedy is a more apt genre for describing postcolonial modernity. In trans studies, it seems to me that we are telling a story of our victimhood (tragedy) or a story of our resistance (romance). I am much more interested in a satire, a genre about how truly disappointing and sometimes even boring it is to be a trans person in this world. As White (2000: 8) argues, histories told as satires "gain their effects *precisely by frustrating normal expectations about the kinds of resolutions provided by stories* cast in other modes." (Chu and Harsin Drager 104-05; emphasis mine)

Disruption of expectations appears again, this time particularly in relation to resolutions. Satires "frustrate" the norms of resolutions, and perhaps disrupt expectations for and about narrative teleology. It is important to note that the White quoted here is Hayden V. White, an American historian best known for working in metahistory. Historiography, then, becomes key to this puzzle. But is this advice only useful for historians?

History and Time in Critical Dystopia

Within the realm of sf, history most squarely lies within dystopian fiction (Varsam 209; Vint 87). Maria Varsam, building on Ernst Bloch, posits the concept of "concrete dystopia," "those events that form the *material* basis for the content of dystopian fiction which have

inspired the writer to warn of the potential for history to repeat itself" (209). This claim builds off previous genre critics' conception of dystopia as a warning ("Persistence of Hope" 520) and connects the dystopia to specific events within history. The Transatlantic Slave Trade is Varsam's focus, although others have written on settler-colonialism (Vint), climate change (Hughes and Wheeler), and more still. Indeed, in my opinion, if a dystopia is to hold any merit, dystopian writers should constellate several concrete dystopias—several material histories—into their work. Within my own creative manuscript, I constellate several concrete dystopias: settler-colonialism, climate change, the Southern Resident capture era, their current decline, the increasing popularity of transphobia and trans-exclusive radical feminism. "Death Drive" was inspired by Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*, two reproductive dystopias in which women are subjected to reproductive slavery, themselves echoes of the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Atwood) and the dispossession of Indigenous children throughout North America's settler-colonial history (Erdrich). In "Death Drive," I constellate these concepts with the rising anti-trans sentiment of the past decade (Mallory 131-146), focusing particularly on trans womanhood as "a social positionality constructed through misogynistic violence and sexual-reproductive exploitation" (Bhatt 152).

Ernst Bloch's "concrete utopia" shares similar material space with Varsam's concrete dystopia, however they "stand in opposition in terms of *time*, the former being forward looking, the latter backward looking" (Varsam 209). The backward look of the concrete dystopia—and therefore any critical dystopian writer—invokes Walter Benjamin's Angelus Novus, the Angel of History, who notably "is turned toward the past," "while the pile of debris before him grows skyward" (257-58). Crucially, in the same essay in which Benjamin theorizes the Angel of History, he urges his readers to "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger,"

and that should we not, the past may “disappear irretrievably” (255). These concepts from Benjmain’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” drive my writing, and certainly, I intend to “turn toward the past” and “seize hold of a memory in a moment of danger.” Am I writing dystopia, then? Not entirely, although it is an entrance. Earlier drafts of my thesis verged closer to reality, although as I revise, I am moving closer to the dystopic genre. This is, at least partially, due to my close analysis of reproductive dystopias in the course “Dystopia and the Question of History” with Dr. Alys E. Weinbaum in the fall quarter of my thesis year.

There is, however, a slippage.

Raffaella Baccolini finds that the most important aspect of the critical feminist dystopia is that it must “maintain the utopian impulse *within* the work,” most often through “ambiguous open endings” and “rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel,” which “opens a space of contestation and opposition for those groups” (“Gender and Genre” 18). While this is the case in many critical feminist dystopias, Baccolini crucially labels this opening as “a horizon of hope,” writing, “critical dystopias show that a culture of memory—one that moves from the individual to the collective—is part of a social project of hope” (“Persistence of Hope” 521). This social project, then, contrasts the project I draw from Chu and Harsin Drager: “optimism without hope.” This is where satire becomes of primary motivation, for it reverts the expectations which Baccolini sets up. It is of note, however, that the strategy remains the same—open endings and ambiguity, an abandonment of telos—even if the tactics are different—for Baccolini, hope, for Chu and Harsin Drager, optimism without hope.

Optimism without being hopeful is similarly, I believe, how one must approach extinction narratives. Of extinction narratives in colonial and decolonial contexts, Juno Salazar Parreñas writes, “Extinction in this book is not a muse for a eulogy about creatures that one nostalgically

misses even while actively killing them (Choy 2011; Heise 2016; Rosaldo 1989). If we were to take on an earthbound perspective of multiscalar time, we would see that extinction, like individual death, is a condition of planetary living" (8-9). Further, for Salazar Parreñas, proleptic mourning is a hinderance to working with endangered animals. She continues, "The challenge of decolonizing extinction, then, is not to end extinction, but to consider how else it might unfold for those who will perish and for those who will survive" (Salazar Parreñas 9). This is a movement away from telos (Haraway 150), in fact of teleology as a whole. This is optimism—"how else it might unfold"—without hope—which the inevitable extinction hinders.

The Posthumanist Transsexual Figure in Future Home of the Living God

It is through these several concepts—disappointment, satire, historicism, dystopia, optimism without hope, and extinction—that I then analyze Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017). In this text, newly pregnant Ojibwe woman Cedar Hawk Songmaker finds her and her fetus' bodies the newly forming theocratic state's most valuable resource—in a time when human neocortices and male sexual genitals are under-developing or not developing at all (Erdrich 67), Cedar's child may be without abnormalities (Erdrich 51). And though Cedar speculates her child may be "abnormal," she remains optimistic about his future. Here, Erdrich gestures toward two diverging posthuman possibilities: undeveloped, animalistic or—with allusions to the Virgin Mary (180) and Immaculate Conception (270)—perfectly human, divine.

Sherryl Vint claims that *Future Home* contains "notions of a posthuman dispositif of personhood" (16). Vint is signifying—and claiming that Erdrich is signifying—that a "posthuman" dispositif is now emerging, one in which "'post' signifies 'after' the era of

humanism but does not imply any kind of teleology of periodization” (16). Teleology becomes important not only because of my question of satirical historicisms and concrete dystopias but also because of evolution’s stuttering, reversing, or full stopping (Erdrich 55; 61; 123) in the novel, a confusing manifestation of time in which the “natural” world is no longer predictable, a mirror of the ongoing effects of settler-colonialism on Cedar’s people and their land. In this context, I further find Erdrich’s gesture to the posthuman to be part of the recent feminist project of conceptualizing posthumanism “through animal, rather than technological, becomings” (Nurka 209). Erdrich’s posthuman is not a cyborg in the sense of Haraway’s 1985 manifesto, but rather “questions the (human) moral construction of what nature supposedly entails” (Nurka 219). This imagining of “posthuman” falls somewhat more in line with Black feminist Zakiyyah Iman Jackson’s preference for the term “inhuman,” which does not presume a single destination, expect a removal of individual re-identifications, and allows more room for the redefinition of “human” itself. As Jackson claims, “Calls to become ‘post’ or move ‘beyond the human’ too often presume that the originary locus of this call, its imprimatur, its appeal, requires no further examination or justification but mere execution of its rapidly routinizing imperative” (215). The space I am allotted here does not allow to make adequate distinctions between “posthuman” and “inhuman” in the trans and decolonial contexts of my or Erdrich’s work, and the bulk of criticism about *Future Home* utilizes the term “posthuman” or no term at all, so that is what I will continue to use in this essay.

For Erdrich, as an Ojibwe author and enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain band of Chippewa Indians of North Dakota, dystopia is inherently part of the past and present. Potawatomi scholar Kyle P. Whyte describes “ancestral dystopias,” “the idea that [some Indigenous peoples] confront climate change having already passed through environmental and

climate crises arising from the impacts of colonialism" (226). Cedar's stepfather Eddy portrays this when Cedar asks, "what's going to happen?" and he answers: "Indians have been adapting since before 1492 so I guess we'll keep adapting" (Erdrich 32). Considering the "ancestral dystopia," Erdrich's feminist dystopia is not simply a warning of the near future, but also a critique of the hegemonic discourse on women's rights and climate change as a norm rather than a novel exception. The dystopia presented in *Future Home* is therefore not just a warning, as some critics claim of both the novel and of the dystopian genre in general (Martínez-Falquina 164), but a latent part of Cedar's (and Erdrich's) past, present, and future.

Returning to Baccolini's claims about hope as necessary for the critical feminist dystopia, I argue that *Future Home* in fact does not contain hope as Baccolini suggests, but rather optimism without hope as I have drawn from Chu and Harsin Drager. Baccolini links hope in the critical feminist dystopia to the narrative "rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel," which "opens a space of contestation and opposition for those groups" ("Gender and Genre" 18). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, for instance, Offred escapes the Commander's house on the Underground Femaleroad, most likely surviving in Canada, out of the reach of the authoritarian Gilead government (Atwood). Erdrich does this a little differently. At the end of her novel, Cedar is still imprisoned, recovering from her son's birth, and destined to be impregnated again (Erdrich 231). Yet she is still looking toward her son. She tells him, "I know you're going to read this someday. I can tell that you're going to wonder what it was like, in the *before*" (Erdrich 230). This is a subversion of Baccolini's critical feminist dystopia—while the protagonist is still subjugated, she sees possibility for her son to escape (Martínez-Falquina 168). (Certainly, that he is "white-passing" and gendered male may make it easier for him

(Faison 95), although I don't see this as the only reason Cedar continues to invoke his future.) This is an optimism for her son without hope for herself.

About evolution, Cedar writes, "folded quietly and knitted in right along with the working DNA there is a shadow self. […] What if some of those silenced genes were reactivated? I don't know how, but what if they were? And they decided to restore us to some former physical equilibrium?" (Erdrich 99). This uncertain open-endedness echoes Baccolini's claims, but it also subverts the expectations of sf as reaching a whole, scientific explanation (Martínez-Falquina 167; Suvin 65). More pressing, the results of these "reactivations" are seen in other animals—a saber-tooth cat-like animal eats a dog (Erdrich 97), chickens have scales (Erdrich 218), dragonflies have three-foot wingspans (Erdrich 233)—but never in human children. This leaves the future of humanity in question. Cedar claims, "We wouldn't see the narrative we think we know […] We might actually see chaos. We might roll back adaptation through adaptation, the way canines will revert to type left on their own until they reach wild dog-slash-wolflike status. Or we might just skip straight to the previous hominin" (Erdrich 55). Evolution is not *just* reversing, but also chaotic, unveiling those shadow selves in uncertain ways. This sense of time mirrors Kyle P. Whyte's conception of "spiraling time," "in which it makes sense to consider ourselves as living alongside future and past relatives simultaneously as we walk through life" (229). Simultaneity is essential here, as Cedar's invocation of her ancestors and her descendants are not just linear and removed from her, but, through evolution's chaos, become ever-present in her thoughts and actions. Erdrich's use of time in the novel makes spiraling time even more embodied and present for the Indigenous characters.

On the other end of the spectrum, Cedar considers unilineal evolution, writing, "Thinkers like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit and paleontologist, have embraced the concept of

evolution as a way to describe the ongoing growth and perfectibility of humanity within the evolving perfection of the cosmos. But we have seemingly reached the end of what Teilhard de Chardin hoped would be our apotheosis" (Erdrich 167). The teleology of unilineal evolutionary theory does, in effect, suggest an end point, an "apotheosis" in which humanity reaches its pinnacle, at which point "the spark of divinity, which we experience as consciousness, is being reabsorbed into the boundless creativity of seething opportunistic life" (Erdrich 65). In the collapse following this high point, then, humanity loses its identity and becomes either monstrous—losing intelligence, and therefore possibility for capitalistic growth—or divine—perfectly human and apotheosized. Camille Nurka identifies the definitional split of "Man" through Locke's theory of social contract, in which the "ambivalences between the divine and the human could be reconciled through the affirmation of a stable sexual identity," granting men "natural dominion over women and 'irrational animals'" (212). Several dualisms—man vs divine, man vs woman, and man vs animal—come into play here, in which heterosexuality and patriarchal domination over both women and animals is what truly defines Man underneath the divine. In *Future Home*, "Man" is nearing his end, with either animal ("the previous hominin") or divine ("the spark of divinity') the only remaining options. What this divinity might mean is ambiguous, although it is seemingly a *step forward* for what used to be regarded as "humanity." As Zakiyyah Iman Jackson argues, moving beyond the human "will require an anamorphic view *of* humanity, a queering of perspective and stance that mutates the racialized terms of Man's praxis of humanism […] Such movement demands a redirection of the euro(andro)(anthropo)centric terms through which perspective is understood, necessitating a disruption of (certain) humans' efforts *to direct and monopolize the internally divided field of perspective*" (217). Cedar's child—the whole future of humanity in *Future Home*—represents

such redirection and disruption, allowing for the "anamorphic view" Jackson desires, and therefore moving as a whole into an identity that is nonhuman.

It is uncertain which of the pathways Cedar's child fits into, and returning to Nurka's consideration of feminist projects that align the posthuman with the animal, we can further analyze these possibilities. If Cedar's child is to be animalistic, he therefore aligns with both the animal and the female; if he is to be divine, he is in fact *beyond* male. The former may align with feminist posthumanism, and may in fact be helpful for a trans critique of masculine Enlightenment narratives while symbolically suggest a transspecies/transsexual movement of the child from human/male to animal/female (Nurka 216). However, while I have thus far positioned the monstruous vs divine as a forked path, there is in fact a slippage between the two that is possible to locate within the novel. When speculating on her child's species, in response to her adoptive parents' fear, Cedar writes, "Perhaps it is because I saw your brain in an icy whirl, your blood as fire, your tiny hand—which *maybe was not a normal baby's hand?* Still, you are wondrous, *a being of light, and I am not afraid*" (Erdrich 57; emphasis mine). The emphasized lines seem to contradict one another, with the abnormalities a possibility, but an angelic being still a strong image. This tension portrays a locus of seeming simultaneity—just as evolution has seemingly reversed even as it continues forward, Cedar's child will be an ancestor of humanity *and* the next step for the species. This makes sense through the lens of spiraling time: Erdrich's Indigenous posthuman is *both* ancestor and descendant at once. Moreover, it alludes to the transsexual being simultaneously normative (via nonnormative attempts) and paradigm disrupting. It is through considering Cedar's child as *both* animalistic and divine, in conjunction with Nurka's posthumanism within animality's gendered markers, that the child in *Future Home* emerges anew as transspecies and, at least symbolically, transgender. This perhaps most directly

portrays Nurka's earlier claims about recent feminist work in posthumanism as focusing on animal becomings rather than Haraway's cyborgian becomings. I see this, then, as a further opening to considering Erdrich's posthumanist gesture as also possibly opening into similar posthuman expectations within trans theory and the transsexual figure.

Telos: Decolonial and Trans Conceptions of Finality

Chu and Harsin Drager cite Donna Haraway as an influential figure for Sandy Stone, and therefore for the posttranssexual. In "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway claims, "The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world" (150). On the same page, she writes, "In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense—a 'final' irony since the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic *telos* of the 'West's' escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate untied at last from all dependency" (150-51). This is, I don't think by coincidence, the same location from which Juno Salazar Parreñas draws her desire to abandon telos in her bid to decolonize extinction: "Even as decolonization demands a serious challenge to the so-called great divides between human and animal or inanimate, it also demands a rejection of a telos (Haraway 1991; Latour 1993). To decolonize extinction is to resist definitively saying what should be or ought to be" (7). Temporality, and particularly complications of narrative arrival, therefore connect decolonial narratives, extinction narratives, and trans narratives. As Cedar considers the future of the species, she laments, "I want to see past my lifetime, past yours, into exactly what the paleontologist says will not exist: the narrative. I want to see the story. More than anything, I am frustrated by the fact that I'll never know how things turn out" (Erdrich 65). This frustration echoes the ambiguity of the ending of the novel: the species of Cedar's child is never made known to Cedar or the audience, therefore keeping the future of humanity in

question, while Cedar remains seemingly indefinitely imprisoned in reproductive slavery. The close connection with this question of narrative closure to Cedar's own question of who her child will be provides her an agency which removes her from the biocolonial tactics of dispossession and Western narrative focus on finality (of a single life, of a species, of an ecosystem; of abstract individuation). The lack of resolution in *Future Home*, then, more than it responds to Baccolini's desire for open-endedness, echoes Chu and Harsin Drager's claim "that trans studies has a narrative problem" (104). As Cedar searches for an answer to this question of finality and Chu and Harsin Drager look toward satire (which itself upends teleological expectations), they look beyond the cyberpunk cyborgian impulse of the late-twentieth century.

Chu and Harsin Drager tell a narrative about the motion implied by the cyborg—"as a way *out* of women"—and the posttranssexual, which "is not just an attempt to disavow transsexuality; it's also an attempt, like *cyborg* before it, to be *post-woman*" (109). And I understand the desire to consider the posthuman in this way. Looking for a way out—of womanhood, of transsexuality, of both—is tempting when, "In the sociobiological model, evolutionary time is still ruled by an irreconcilably human moralism that accords significant differential value to reproducers and nonreproducers, male minds and female minds, human minds and animal minds" (Nurka 220). But to consider that transsexuality cannot reconcile this model, that rather posttranssexuality is necessary, is to deny trans of its agency. As Nurka says, "Trans is busily transforming human time, changing what it means to be a gendered human in its rejection of the linear determinism implied within the nature/culture dichotomy. That is, trans is actively changing the crude evolutionary interpretation of species as pure biology that perpetually precedes a largely irrelevant cultural structure" (220). Nurka's conceptualization here portrays the importance of trans—in a way posttrans does not or cannot—as an active agent in

the sociological and biological world. Through the lens of *Future Home of the Living God*, Cedar's child (and the other inevitable children of that world) does something quite similar. The chaos of evolution in *Future Home* and the threat to several cultural structures—namely, Christianity, patriarchy, white supremacism—contests such humanist moralism. This is the questioning of what "humanity" means that Jackson calls for in her critique of posthuman. It is also why Erdrich's posthuman—among other interpretations of the posthuman—benefits more from transsexuality than posttranssexuality.

It is necessary, then, to consider the disruptions, asynchrony, and simultaneity within my own temporality: disruptions of my agency by transphobic and transmisogynistic expectations; disruptions of cisheteropatriarchal norms in my gendered approaches to and away from them; disruptions of my endocrine system and my environment's hormonal levels as I take HRT (or am barred from it via legal or financial obstacles); my asynchronous gendered development which differs from my peers; my asynchronous or delayed experiences of teenage puberty and subsequent sexual explorations; my simultaneous movement away from norms and nonnormative re-approaches to them. These are trans temporalities which, while parallel to queer temporalities, are not quite "queer, again," and therefore necessary for a trans approach to the similar questions of teleology in decolonial and extinction studies. These temporalities recall the disrupting significance of the transsexual figure not as metaphorical figure which somehow proves cissexist gender norms but as her own being with agency and narrative power.

Stone perhaps unwittingly betrays her own posttranssexual project when she writes, "In the transsexual as a text we may find the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected

geometries" (296). This is, in essence, an extraction, a bottom-up approach which takes the transsexual again as an isolated figure of disruption that *tells us something about gender as a whole*. As Chu writes, "[Stone is] laying the groundwork for the long-standing intellectual move in which the trans person, just through the act of existing, becomes a kind of living incubator for *other people*'s theories of gender" (Chu and Harsin Drager 110). As the posttranssexual focuses on movement away from intelligibility, the transsexual is relegated even deeper into Stryker's original critique of Baudrillard—a metaphorical figure for broader cissexual political anxieties.

I should point out that this remains a common—and I feel necessary—aspect of trans studies today, although perhaps with this definitional work finally being done from a trans perspective. Jules Gill-Peterson, in *A Short History of Trans Misogyny*, lays out the ideological necessity of transfeminism. (It is ridiculous, might I say, that in 2025, we even *need* an entire book proving transfeminism's importance.) In the introduction, Gill-Peterson poses the question, "How do the socially high-status *'aqi* of the Chumash people of present-day California, responsible for handling burial procedures; the stigmatized *renyao* (translatable as "human ghost" or "monster") in China and Taiwan; and the *fa'afafine* of the Samoan diaspora, for example, unify into something shared with trans women in the US, Europe, or Australia?" (25). Gill-Peterson finds this question necessary because of "the reductive violence of colonialism, which included the enforcement of a male/female sex binary in which trans life acquired its present association with boundary-crossing" (25).

Talia Bhatt, who grew up in India but has transitioned primarily in the West, critiques the perspective of patriarchy or gender binary as "a colonial export," writing, "I do not know how to explain to learned academics that sexual objectification and reproductive exploitation were not innovations that the West pioneered, nor do I know how to explain that a historical record of

'asceticism', of hijra being prescribed a livelihood of begging for alms at ceremonies, is not 'reverence' or an 'institutionalized gender-role', but marginalization" (135). This is a conversation which requires incredible nuance. And while I agree with Gill-Peterson's counterpoint—that "transgender" arose out of a white, American need "for a hegemonic identity for the 'common good'" (Leslie Feinberg's *Transgender Warriors*, notable for popularizing the term, not only thanks Adrienne Rich but also relies on Orientalist and noble savage archetypes)—I also find that, as Bhatt portrays, the transhistorical and transcultural othering of transfeminized individuals makes a study in transmisogyny necessary at this time.

This is more or less the conclusion Gill-Peterson comes to as well: "Straight men, gay men, nonbinary people, and non-trans women not only share the world with trans women; they rely on trans femininity to distinguish their genders and sexualities, including through overlap" (124). It is through the visage of the transfeminized subject, or the trans woman, that all others are able to conceptualize their own gender identities. This, I believe, is why Stone felt the need to search for a cyborgian "way out" with the posttranssexual. It has long been written in feminist spaces that womanhood is defined by manhood—Simone de Beauvoir may have put it best in *The Second Sex* when she wrote, "One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine" (273). de Beauvoir's consideration sees the male as inherent and the female as produced; it is no wonder Haraway and Stone would look for a way out. Yet, Andrea Long Chu's divisive book *Females* poses just the opposite: "femaleness is a universal sex defined by self-negation, against which all politics, even feminist politics, rebels. Put more simply: Everyone is female, and everyone hates it" (15). Trans women, under Chu's organization

of gender, are perhaps the *most female*, having recognized our "universality" and moved away from the social construction of masculinity enforced onto us. This, of course, is echoed in Gill-Peterson's claim that "Trans women *are* extra. Trans femininity *is* too much" (124). And it is for this reason that we are positioned at the locus from where all other gendered identities materialize. Transfeminists call this position "third-sexing," a riff on de Beauvoir's rationale of the *Second Sex* (Serano 174-75; Bhatt 126-27).

Like this "third sex," the children in Erdrich's *Future Home* occupy a position from which humanity can define itself—"an anamorphic view of humanity" (Jackson 217). It is through the negation of Cedar's child as nonhuman (both/either animal and/or divine) that Cedar and her family can define themselves as human. Both these children and the transsexual figure, then, "interrogates the notion that only the 'natural' body is the one we were born with and which must correspond with normatively right kinds of 'natural' behaviors and appropriate heterosexualized desires" (Nurka 219). That Cedar's child—and all the future children in *Future Home*—represent transspecies crossing similarly situates the future of the novel alongside transsexuality's role as an active agent rather than just a symbol within postmodernity and posthumanity (Nurka 220). Put differently, "Trans is busily transforming human time, changing what it means to be a gendered human in its rejection of linear determinism implied within the nature/culture dichotomy. That is, trans is actively changing the crude evolutionary interpretation of species as pure biology that perpetually precedes a largely irrelevant cultural structure" (Nurka 220). As in *Future Home*, a rejection of teleology—via spiraling time, trans time, or some other conception—and a transspecies approach to (more-than-)human becomings are necessary aspects of the solution to trans studies' "narrative problem."

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