NON-BINARY TRANS SUBJECTS: EXITING THE ATTACHMENT TO THE
TRANSGENDER METANARRATIVE OF MAN/WOMAN

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the emergence of what I call the Transgender Metanarrative. It demonstrates how the Transgender Metanarrative functions as a form of confessional identity politics and biopower, in line with the sex and gender binary, by elevating awareness of binary transpeople (transmen/boys and transwomen/girls) while excluding non-binary trans subjects (trans subjects who identify as neither man nor woman). It investigates the ramifications and pervasive effects of this Transgender Metanarrative whereby some parts of the trans movement have created a new sex/gender binary in their attempts to escape it in the first place. The Transgender Metanarrative has exclusionary consequences in further marginalizing people who identify without a gender or gender(s) beyond man and woman.

My research focuses on the early twenty-first century’s transgender phenomenon in academia (‘transgender/trans studies’), social discourse (legislative efforts and organizational policies), and popular culture (particularly fiction and non-fiction film). The film analysis identifies in both binary trans and non-binary trans films key thematic motifs that work to cement the ideology of the Transgender Metanarrative, while signaling an emerging counter-culture of non-binary trans discourse that poses a direct challenge to society’s binary-based understanding of gender and transgender. Using film analysis and poststructuralist theory, particularly queer theory, the dissertation calls for a critical deconstruction of the Transgender Metanarrative. I posit that a non-binary notion of gender will influence gender studies the same way queer theory has influenced understandings of sexuality.

My identification as a non-binary transperson is employed as a form of feminist positionality and queer methodology throughout the text. I call this methodology an autoethnography of disidentification (Muñoz), to by reasserting non-binary transgender
subjectivity to disrupt the hegemonic Transgender Metanarrative. This intervention happens in both visual (images) and written form. My autoethnography of disidentification, challenges Butler’s theory of gender performativity to make an autonomous break with the ‘doing’ before the ‘being’ of gender identity. I argue that this creative autonomous break allows for non-binary genders to be imagined and recognized. The autoethnography of disidentification articulates my non-binary subjective experience in order to invite the reader/viewer to understand the social reality for a non-binary transperson.
Preface

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The author owns full copyright for all of the images from exhibit entitled “Rebooting and Recoding Trans/Gender.” The photographer for the images is credited as Jen Sungshine. Make-up and Hair Designer and Key Make-up Artist and Hair Stylist for images credited as Lala McQueen. Lighting Technician credited as Florian Halbedl. Make-up Artist Assistant credited as Jennifer MacLaren and Hair Assistant credited as Jessica Glyn-Jones. Production Assistants for images credited as James Joseph Ferguson and Belinda Williams.

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I dedicate my work to the queer yet here people of this world who society fails to appreciate.

To the beautiful array of genders that exist.

To the non-binary people around the world who thrive in their beautiful diversity, determined
and joyful in the light of being beyond the binary.

But, also to those of us who are lost to the fear, the darkness and the hate...

This work is for you,

to light your way, to fight for your way and to exist if you could not or cannot.
“A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.”

- Ludwig Wittgenstein

“Deru kui wa utareru.” (The stake that sticks up gets hammered down.)

- Japanese Proverb

Chapter One:

Introduction to a Transgender Phenomenon: Terminologies, Metanarratives and Problems

The Start of a Beginning: Unknown Spaces

A beginning always implies an eventual ending. Binaries inform our everyday lives in a multiplicity of ways. I was born under the powerful hegemony of binaries acting as a form of constraint within and without my body that categorized me into the system of sex and gender. My birth on July 10th, 1982 was an eventful occasion not only for my parents as I was their first born child, but also for me being born into a dialectical discourse founded on tension between one or the other – male/female, man/woman, masculine/feminine. At my birth, my Mother (like many mothers do) asked “What is it?” immediately after I left her body, as if I was not human until I was sexed, gendered and categorized into the sex and gender binary. The Doctor curiously responded, “It’s a girl. No… it’s a boy!” I reflect on this moment as the beginning of my journey down myriad paths of gender confusion. I was confused by my gender and this confusion is founded on a multifaceted and complex web of ideologies, cultural schemas and biopolitics that are arguably some of the most powerful discourses working to situate us as intelligible human beings in society.
Image 1.1 RAW © Joshua M. Ferguson 2016.
People are confused by my gender. This “It’s a girl. No…it’s a boy” moment of articulation has haunted my life as a leitmotif that reoccurs on an almost daily basis. However, the linguistic weapon to disrupt the binary of sex and gender is found precisely within this ellipsis – the unspeakable space. What lies in the ellipsis enables a deconstruction of this binary-based tension between one or the other. My Mother’s question: “What is it?” is apt because I remain an “it” as I cannot be recognized within the knowable realms of gender. “What is it?” is the question that must be answered to carve a vernacular space of recognition for people like me who identify beyond the gender binary. The beginning is quite literally the moment we acknowledge that our current systems of understanding gender have failed us. The ellipsis is the space that I will enunciate in both written and visual forms within this dissertation. I am a “…,” and I deserve societal and cultural acknowledgement.

Because there is no language to express what gender I am, I have included another form of expression in this study. The ellipsis that I have identified will be filled by the images interspersed throughout this dissertation, the methodological purpose of which is to disrupt the reader, rebooting and recoding thinking about gender beyond the binary.

My dissertation invites you to step onto an unfamiliar path. I invite you to step away from what is known and stand at a distance (Rosi Braidotti “Four Theses” n.p.) to understand what is written with my mind/body, my heart and my research in this study. I ask you to exit the attachment to binaries and join me to reimagine what Rosi Braidotti calls “ecologies of belonging” (Braidotti “Four Theses” n.p.). Walk into an unknown in your mind/body from the familiar to the liminality that exists between the binary (the ellipsis). The journey will be multiple, it will venture into spaces without any light, it will horrify some and excite others. The exploration will be a poststructuralist defamiliarization of the known, moving into the
unknown. I will respect the existing, but I will not participate in the repetition of being without difference (Braidotti “Four Theses” n.p.).

My dissertation will examine how humans are inhabited by ghosts of multiple narration (Braidotti “Four Theses” n.p.), or what I call a gender and Transgender Metanarrative or grand narrative. The metanarrative of gender occupies and constrains societal understanding of “transgender.” John Stephens and Robyn McCallum describe a metanarrative to be a “totalizing cultural narrative schema” that works to “order and explain knowledge and experience” (6). To challenge this transgender metanarrative, my dissertation relies upon Jean-François Lyotard’s modest localized narratives – *petits récits* -- in order to articulate the diversity of human experience (*Postmodern Condition*) through my autoethnography in both visual and written forms.

My dissertation is intended as a poststructuralist, methodologically trans and queer set of *petits récits* to disrupt the gender and Transgender Metanarrative constrained by the binary. I am neither man nor woman. As the author of this dissertation, it matters who I am. I am writing this dissertation because of my difference and this difference will manifest in many forms by engaging with both the written word and the visual as a hybrid, queer method of articulating theoretical lines of inquiry about trans identity and expression.

There are diverse types of people globally who identify as neither men nor women. Most non-binary transpeople around the world are absent from societal recognition due to the hegemonic binary conflation of sex, gender identity and gender expression, which is the one aspect of Western culture that seems to persist across many countries, languages and regional specificities. However, it is important to recognize that cultures of gender are diverse and always specific to regional context and that it is not just transpeople who are impacted by binaries. All trans subjectivities and/or experiences around the world are not the
same in relation to the mostly Western binaries of sex and gender. More research is needed to investigate the pervasive effects of homogenizing discourses around the world in terms of sex, gender and sexuality, particularly the transgender metanarrative. How do transpeople exist beyond the binary considering the pervasive hegemony of man/woman? Why are non-binary transgender subjects excluded from the discursive attempt to recognize transpeople? The binary system of sex and gender is discursively produced by a multiplicity of societal and cultural facets. However, this work specifically focuses on my theory of the Transgender Metanarrative.

The Transgender Metanarrative is a grand narrative embedded in ideology, confessional identity politics and biopower to cement a singular version of trans subjectivity in line with the binary. I explore the undeniable emergence of transgender subjects in popular culture founded on this homogeneous understanding of transpeople in line with the binary – the Transgender Metanarrative. Transgender has become a cultural phenomenon in the West and beyond, but non-binary trans subjects have been excluded and pushed deeper into the margins. My dissertation focuses on how mainstream discourse of transgender (focused on transpeople as either transmen or transwomen) excludes transpeople beyond the binary of sex and gender. My work examines the Transgender Metanarrative in popular culture texts, particularly fiction and non-fiction (documentary) cinema in addition to brief mentions of television shows, video games and advertisements. Furthermore, the Transgender Metanarrative is challenged with the representation of non-binary subjects in film and in my autoethnography of disidentification (both written and visual), so this work is both articulating coherence to the idea of the Transgender Metanarrative and a disruptive strategy of disidentification against it.
My critical and cultural feminist intervention employs Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s concept of strategic essentialism to make a hybrid distinction between binary transgender and non-binary transgender people because this is a necessary distinction to ameliorate the exclusionary-based focus on transpeople within the binary. Spivak notes the usefulness of elements of universalizing discourse, particularly essentialist discourse (Grosz 185) and Emily S. Lee writing on Derrida reiterates this strategy by saying that “with each encounter a strategy plays with the essentialist ideas in a wily way and continues to participate in theory-making” (n.p. Lee). I recognize the potential in essentializing as a form of deconstructing hegemonic binary-based language because as Derrida notes deconstruction both “overturns hierarchical oppositions” and marks “the irruptive emergence of a new ‘concept,’ a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime” (*Of Grammatology* 42). Therefore, the strategic essentialist distinction between binary trans and non-binary trans is not really a new binary after all because it is in this type of “theory-making” that one can deconstruct by “insisting on heterogeneity” (Dawne McCance 21) in order to initiate the emergence of a new concept ‘non-binary’ to disrupt the previous regime. This new concept of ‘non-binary’ challenges the consistently deferred meaning of language that Derrida implied in relation to *differance* and deconstruction (*Limited Inc* 136). Ultimately, the heterogeneous signification of non-binary in this act of strategic essentialism both challenges essentialist discourse and signifies a theoretical term that could be understand in a similar way to gender as we understand queer in relation to sexuality, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

My intertextual (by combining portraits of myself, autoethnographic short essays, literature review, theory and analysis) and interdisciplinary (feminist studies, film studies, autoethnography and film production) methodology will act as a unique research project to
make a vital contribution towards the evolution of trans studies. I argue that it is imperative that feminist/gender studies and other areas of the academy recognize the importance of re-conceptualizing gender beyond the binary. This work needs to occur in theory in order for an actual articulation in reality articulated in this multifaceted text.

There is a layering of work to be done to arrive at the beginning of this journey. This introduction will start to layer the heart of the problem of this metanarrative. First, I will situate the language and terminology of sex, gender and transgender. Second, I will outline my thesis, the problems important to my work and the corresponding chapters in this study.

An Overview of Terminology, Language and an Introduction to Transgender Divisions as a Category of Containment

“Language sustains the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a literal way; rather, it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible.” – Judith Butler (1997)

It is critically important to this dissertation that specific gender-based terminology and language is understood because it prevents an easy and lazy slippage into homogenizing understandings of gender- and transgender/trans-specific language. A. Finn Enke states that “the English language imposes binary gender, and, in many cases, it requires work to circumvent this imposition” (“Notes on Terms” 16). The poststructuralist perspective on language views terms in varied specificities, and not in a narrow sense of the word specific but rather a multiplicity of meanings that can change with time, place and, to borrow from Braidotti, one’s embodied and embedded sense of knowing (“Four Theses” n.p.). My own understanding of these terms is based on extensive research in the fields of feminist, queer, and trans studies in addition to my own embodied and embedded perspective. Therefore, I am not saying that the definitions given here are absolute truths and/or the “correct” ones, in
line with Enke’s assertion that “meanings and uses change across time and place” (“Notes on Terms” 16). It is important to realize that people can have diverse understandings of terminology and my definitions here should not be seen as applying to everyone around the world. Gender (and sex to some extent) is inherently relative to specificities of culture and history. In this dissertation, it is my intention to ameliorate some misunderstandings of language and to clarify the differences between some commonly conflated terms, which will create a foundation for understanding a diversity of trans subjects, particularly those of us who identify beyond the binary.
I will define the following terms for the theoretical clarity of my dissertation: sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, transsexual, transgender, non-binary transgender, trans, cisgender, and gender-inclusive pronouns. There are other terms that are important to some transpeople, but I will focus on this list because the current list of terms for transpeople is already extensive and constantly evolving. The plethora of terms and trans identities only reaffirms the amazing diversity found within the trans community.¹

I will start with my chosen umbrella terms for this dissertation: “trans” and “transpeople.” The first, trans, is a generic descriptor to signify any and all trans identities, expression and related discourses whereas transpeople refers specifically to people who are trans, instead of using “transgender people,” which, in my view, homogenizes rather than represents diversity. Trans or transpeople are “inclusive and respectful” terms that escape the political complexity with the more popular umbrella term “transgender.” Enke believes that using trans (trans-, trans) and transpeople “avoids the subcultural specificities and alliances that require specialized knowledge for appropriate use” (“Notes on Terms” 19). Aaron H. Devor also notes that “throughout the world, the word transgender has been increasingly linguistically shortened and conceptually expanded into the term trans” (1). Feinberg noted in 1996 in hir seminal text Transgender Warriors that “the word trans is being used increasingly by the gender community as a term uniting the entire coalition” (xi).² Stephen Whittle also points out that “trans” came into formal usage in the late 1990s, but says that it was initiated by a London parliamentary discussion group in 1998 “with the deliberate intention of being as inclusive as possible when negotiating equality legislation” (“Where Did We Go Wrong?” xi). In contrast, “transgender” is part of a homogenizing and

¹ There is great diversity among cis-people/non-transpeople, too, of course, but perhaps not the same degree of intensity of attempts to find specific terms for all types of non-trans-ness.
² Feinberg’s preferred pronouns were ze/hir.
universalizing “dominant discourse; gender variant people in many parts of the world may not identify with the concept or with the political regimes that disseminate its logics” (Enke “Notes on Terms” 20). My dissertation will argue that the reliance on and usage of “transgender” as an umbrella term is one of the problematic components of the current trans phenomenon. “Transgender” has been subsumed into the linguistic conflation of sex and gender. This is a critical problem because sex and gender are not synonymous, as I will discuss further below.

The most commonly held gender- and sexed-based identities are “man” and “woman.” Man and woman are fictitious cultural categories that conflate several aspects of gender, sex, and often sexuality; they are constructed to rationalize identities. Although many (maybe most) people believe that they are simple expressions of biological fact, “woman” and “man” are not biologically-based identities. The paired terms “woman” and “man” constitute a socially constructed binary; they only have meaning in relation to each other, and furthermore, akin to all binaries there is a clear hierarchy: “man”/”woman” thrives within patriarchy because one side is inferior (woman) to the other (man). The usually unquestioned, implicitly exclusionary meaning of “man” is masculine/male/(heterosexual); that of “woman,” similarly, is feminine/female/(heterosexual). In other words, the terms conflate sex, gender, sometimes sexuality, and social position. (I will return to a discussion of “woman” and “man” below.)

The distinction between sex and gender is crucial to understanding the differences between transsexual and transgender people. The term transsexual is outdated and no longer

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3 I do not mean to say that people who identify with man and woman as their gender identities are fictitious, but that in theory these terms are constructed/fabricated by culture. The only truth about these terms is that they are relative to one’s experience and point of view (Bornstein “Kate Bornstein Keynote”).
used, but I use it here for clarification purposes in understanding how language has contributed to the homogenization and conflation of sex and gender within the term transgender. “Sex relates to biological differences (chromosomal sex, gonadal sex, hormonal sex, internal reproductive organs – for example, uterus and prostrate gland—external genitals)” Nataf 14; see also Enke “Notes on Terms” 17). Sex is a matter of one’s biological status as either male, female or intersex. Generally, society holds on to a very rigid understanding of sexed subjectivity, particularly that all bodies are either male or female. However, recent evolutions in the appropriate use of language (see Chase Strangio “What Is a ‘Male Body’?) have focused on the problematic assumption of either AMAB-bodied or AFAB-bodied people. To follow Judith Butler, sex is also understood as a social construction in a similar, but not the same, way as gender. When a person is born they are assigned a sex (either male or female) based on very reductive external morphological characteristics (genitalia make-up) and not the complex system outlined above that determines one’s sexed body as either male, female or intersex. This assumptive and reductive assignment parallels the gender-assignment as well that occurs at birth. Therefore, although it is important to recognize the distinction between sex and gender, I will avoid assuming both sex and gender throughout this work. Instead, assigned-female-at-birth (AFAB) and assigned-male-at-birth (AMAB) will be used to replace the outdated terms male-bodied and female-bodied, except where the transperson or non-transperson identifies as having either a male or female body. AFAB and AMAB is thus not about the past socio-medical assignment of one’s sex and/or gender that is different from their identity. These terms evoke the present as it creates space for someone to self-identify and raises a question

Butler theorizes that sex and gender distinctions, especially as social and cultural constructions, are enmeshed.
about the assumptive origins of our identities. AFAB and AMAB also create room for intersex identities to be recognized, as male-bodied / female-bodied completely erodes possible intersex subjectivity. Ultimately, sex biodiversity is well understood in nature and supports its social construction in culture as a binary; however, it is my intention to focus more on gender considering that sex is often used as the exemplar for understanding (and pathologizing) transpeople.

In contrast, “gender is a social, cultural and psychological system,” that is, gender “is not derived from biology and is culturally relative, stemming primarily from political, economic, moral, religious and legal domains” (Nataf 14). Because gender is more relative and complex, many scholars have variously defined it. Enke says that gender results from various cultural practices “of ordering or organizing different types of people according to bodies and behaviours” (“Notes on Terms” 17). Gender, then, “refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for boys and men or girls and women” (APA). Eve Sedgwick suggests that chromosomal sex is “the raw material on which is then based the social construction of gender” (27), and Wilchins agrees: “Gender is what culture makes of the sexed body” (Queer Theory: Gender Theory 135). To summarize, gender is about norms—socially constructed norms, specific to a time and place. Although most societies tend to assume that gender arises “naturally” from sex, the fact that gender norms vary so greatly from time to time and place to place makes it clear that there is no necessary or causal relation between them. Gender is a complex, multilayered, ideologically-saturated cultural concept. In particular, gender, gender identity and gender expression are specific to cultural context. The framework discussed here is from a Western perspective, but it is important to acknowledge
that some indigenous cultural specificities around the world challenge the reductive understanding of gender as a binary construct.

Related terms include “gender identity” and “gender presentation” or “gender expression.” Gender identity is “one’s sense of one’s self as a gendered person (e.g. as man, woman, both, neither, or some other configuration of gender). A person’s gender identity may or may not match the sex assigned at birth or current legal sex” (Enke “Notes on Terms” 18). Gender expression is typically understood as masculine, feminine or androgynous and these expressions exist on a continuum rather than a binary. Gender expression and/or gender presentation relates to “how people express, wear, enact, and perform gender through behaviour, mannerisms, clothing, speech, physicality, and selective body modification” (Enke “Notes on Terms” 18). It is important to recognize that gender identity and gender expression are not synonymous and that they simultaneously contribute to the notion of gender, which makes this term more complex than the current dominant societal understanding. See figure 1 for diagrams to clarify the problematic categorical differences between society’s hegemonic understanding of sex, gender and transgender compared to the theoretical categorical differences used in this dissertation.
If we understand the words “gender” and “sex” to refer to two different things, then we begin to see the problem with conflating them in words such as “transgender” (as it is currently used). If we follow the definitions above, then “transsexual” should be about the body and one’s identity as one of the two sexes: male and female (excluding consideration of intersex for the moment). Transgender should be about the complex concatenation of social norms, identity, and expression that is gender, and therefore includes more possibilities than the either/or of the sexed body. As I will discuss, the conflation of sex and gender in the term “transgender” as it is commonly used—as an umbrella term for all transpeople—renders a large number of those people invisible and unspeakable.

**Figure 1 – Sex & Gender Breakdown**

If we understand the words “gender” and “sex” to refer to two different things, then we begin to see the problem with conflating them in words such as “transgender” (as it is currently used). If we follow the definitions above, then “transsexual” should be about the body and one’s identity as one of the two sexes: male and female (excluding consideration of intersex for the moment). Transgender should be about the complex concatenation of social norms, identity, and expression that is gender, and therefore includes more possibilities than the either/or of the sexed body. As I will discuss, the conflation of sex and gender in the term “transgender” as it is commonly used—as an umbrella term for all transpeople—renders a large number of those people invisible and unspeakable.
How to make sense of transgender, then, if I do not employ it as the umbrella term for transpeople? Enke suggests that transgender “incorporates three distinct but overlapping arenas of social organization” (“Notes on Terms” 18). Transgender is used as

1) the name of a social movement

2) an ever-expanding social category

3) an identity that may include “a gender identity that differs from the sex assigned at birth; a gender expression that differs from that conventionally expected of people according to their bodily sex; and/or a desire for alteration for the body’s sex/gender characteristics” (Enke “Notes on Terms” 19; see also Feinberg).

The third usage of transgender is important to examine because, as I shall show, in reality this term has come to mean a singular and homogeneous notion of being trans: either as a transman (what is sometimes called FTM) or a transwoman (MTF). In Susan Stryker’s seminal text Transgender History, she uses transgender to mean “people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (trans-) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain gender” (1), which refers to the “widest and imaginable range of gender-variant practices and identities” (19). Stryker acknowledges that transgender is used as a descriptive term for a “heterogeneous class of phenomena” and that “we took the easy way out and pragmatically acknowledged…[the term] transgender for all its limitations and masked agendas” (“(De)Subjugated Knowledges” 3). Furthermore, Stryker notes the inexhaustible catalog of specific terms globally for gender variety (Transgender History 23). So, is this term (transgender) not problematic to employ as a way

5 Transman is often used interchangeably with FTM and transwoman with MTF, but it is more widely acceptable and respectful to use “transman” and “transwoman” instead of the acronyms for female-to-male and male-to-female.
of referring to such a wide range of gender / transgender diversity? Does it not in fact constrain more than it liberates?

I argue for a new definition of transgender, one that challenges the umbrella understanding of this term. Transgender in dominant discourse vis-à-vis popular culture has come to closely align itself with what used to be referred to by the outdated term “transsexual.” Thus, the current understanding of transgender is closely aligned to a “significant cross-gender identity” (Enke “Notes on Terms” 19), that is, an identity that relies on a simple binary opposition. In other words, the current understanding of transgender implies a crossing from one side of the sex/gender binary to the other through hormonal and surgical means (gender reassignment surgery) and other bodily modifications. Mimi Marinucci states that “more recently…many people have begun using gender almost interchangeably with sex” (54) and that consequently “the term transgender has largely replaced the term transsexual in reference to people who opt for medical intervention to bring the sex of the body into closer alignment with their internal identity” (55).

Viviane Namaste, however, argues against the inclusion of all trans identities within the category of transgender. Namaste states that, “transsexuals object to being included under a catch-all phrase of transgender” (2). She argues that the term transgender emerged from “the Anglo-American lesbian and gay community” (2). Namaste is correct to point out this connection because it is American identity politics that has propagated the usage of transgender, wherein it appears as an inclusive umbrella term on the surface, even though it is actually an exclusive term that effectively erases and excludes trans diversity. This conflation of sex and gender is problematic both for transsexuals, as Namaste points out, and for those who identify in a non-binary way.
As we have seen, the dominant discourse of “transgender” revolves around mostly transmen/boys and transwomen/girls who identify within the binary. Sandy Stone reaffirms that “sex and gender are quite separate issues, but transsexuals commonly blur the distinction by confusing the performative character of gender with the physical ‘fact’ of sex, referring to their perceptions of their situation as being in the ‘wrong body’” (152). Most binary transgender people believe that they are born with a static gender identity either as a woman/girl or man/boy that is not in line with their sexed body. Non-binary transgender people on the other hand typically identify beyond the man/woman binary.

So, I ask: why do some binary transpeople identify as “transgender” when they do not identify “across” genders, considering that they were born with a gender identity that has not changed since birth? It is, rather, the sexed body of some binary transpeople that they work to bring in line with a stable gender identity of man or woman that is in opposition to their assigned sex and gender at birth. I identify as neither man nor woman and was born without a gender identity because language does not exist for a third-gendered-space. I use the term “non-binary” to refer to my transgender identity and experience, and “binary” to refer to that identity and experience which used to be called transsexual. There are, of course, similarities between binary and non-binary transpeople. Some non-binary transpeople choose hormonal and surgical intervention and other bodily modifications just as many binary transpeople do, so why have we been excluded from mainstream “transgender” discourse? And, what are the implications for this exclusion? How useful is the distinction between binary and non-binary transpeople in understanding the diversity of trans identities and expressions?

An in-depth investigation into the categorical and political conflicts inherent in the term “transgender” will be explored in Chapter Three. However, it is important to highlight
here how this term encapsulates a political division between transpeople as belonging to one of two groups: 1) either/or (binary) or 2) both/neither (non-binary). Katrina Roen explores this either/or and both/neither division, and highlights an oppression dimension that is part of both categories, by examining how (non-binary) “transgenderism (the both/neither stance) exalts outness, fluidity, and transgression… . [W]ho counts (as gender outlaw) depends on how possible it is to be out.” For those in repressive societies or those in subordinate social positions, “outness” may be an inaccessible possibility. Similarly, she notes that, “Who counts as transsexual (in the sense of the either/or stance) rests on who can pass, which depends particularly on who has access to reassignment technologies and is therefore influenced by class, race, education and so on” (511). Roen goes on to suggest that both the “both/neither position and the either/or position are problematic in terms of exclusivity and their failure to account for socioeconomic factors” (511).

The division of transpeople into these two “camps” is clearly due to the hegemony of binaries, with binary transpeople (transmen and transwomen on the one side) and non-binary transpeople (genderqueer, gender-fluid, gender non-conforming among other identities) on the other. Patricia Elliot’s notion of transgender as a contested site (in Debates in Transgender) implies the multilayered political and theoretical dimension of this term. I will provide a brief genealogical situation of the term transgender in Chapter Three, which will help to clarify the ontological division between these two camps.

“Cisgender” and “cissexual” are terms that refer to the opposite of “transgender” and “transsexual.” Once again, a binary is set up between those who are cis and those who are trans—all people are defined as being one or the other. “Cis” is from the Latin prefix meaning “on the same side or staying with the same orientation, [so] ‘cisgender’ and ‘cissexual’ name the characteristic of staying with or being perceived to stay with the gender
and/or sex one was assigned at birth” (Enke “Notes on Terms” 20). “Trans,” on the other hand, literally means “across,” which implies the crossing of genders or sexes. I will examine how this reliance on cisgender/transgender as the dominant discourse of understanding gender normativity/non-normativity also feeds into a homogenizing metanarrative that works to exclude non-binary people in the production of the category ‘transpeople.’ As Enke suggests, “insisting on a clear cis/trans-dichotomy creates more problems than it solves” (“Education of Little Cis” 234). Therefore, I use non-trans identified, when possible, instead of the more popular term cisgender as I believe cisgender sets up an assumptive and reductive dynamic between people who are visibly trans and people who are not, which I argue at length later in the dissertation.
Enke states that “gender-inclusive pronouns are not associated with a specific gender and thereby do not ascribe gender” (“Notes on Terms” 17). Gender-inclusive or gender-neutral pronouns will be used throughout this dissertation when the author’s gender identity is unknown to work against the automatic use of he/him/his and she/her/hers in language. I use the gender-inclusive pronoun they/them/their (subject/object/possessive) for myself (and its use by non-binary transpeople is increasing), so I will use this throughout the dissertation as the chosen gender-inclusive pronoun. However, ze/hir/hir is another gender-inclusive/neutral pronoun used by and for transpeople who identify outside of the binary. I believe they/them/their is gaining prominence in discourse (compared to ze/hir/hir and other configurations) because it is already rooted in lexicon. “The singular ‘they’ dates back to the fifteenth century and is common in some parts of the English-speaking world” (Enke “Notes on Terms” 17). However, I think it is precisely the fact that a plural conception of “they” is common that makes it attractive for some non-binary transpeople. I often consider myself to have multiple genders and/or the place I identify with is a third-space of multiplicity and hybridity, so the plural implication of “they” is a theoretical promise for people who exist in this third-space.

I also want to note an important point about the reality for transpeople before moving to the next section of this introductory chapter. My theory in this dissertation, by drawing from existing theory and evolving it to create a new way of seeing the world, challenges and disrupts the metanarrative of transgender. This Transgender Metanarrative erodes trans diversity from the category in that it privileges a monolithic notion of being trans, one that is in line with the sex and gender binary of identifying either as a transman or transwoman. However, my objective is not to render transwomen and transmen invisible and practice the same exclusionary production currently rendering non-binary transpeople invisible. Binary
transpeople, particularly trans people of colour, face dangerous levels of violence around the world. A recent article by TIME entitled “Why Transgender People are Being Murdered at a Historic Rate” suggests that the number of transpeople murdered in the U.S. in 2015 is at a historic high (Steinmetz n.p.). Transgender women of colour facing the intersectional oppression of both transphobia and racism are at an even greater risk of being the victim of violent crimes and murders (Steinmetz “Why Transgender People” n.p.). Therefore, social science research investigating the intersectional oppression of transwomen of colour in the disciplinary realm of the social sciences is a necessity. My dissertation acknowledges this important area for trans studies in terms of the violence that transwomen of colour face, even though my humanities-based focus is on transpeople who fall outside of the transgender binary.

The Exclusionary Production of Non-Binary Trans People: Chapter Descriptions

“I am not me without you; I am not some(one) without every(Body).” – Jennifer Esposito

I am neither man nor woman. As the author of this work it matters who I am. I am writing this dissertation because of my difference and this difference will manifest in many forms by engaging with both the textual and the visual as a way of articulating theoretical lines of inquiry.

The gender identities of woman and man are the one aspect of Western culture that seems to persist across countries, languages and regions. Man and woman are the only possible realities for societal recognition as human subjects, so what happens to transgender people who identify beyond the binary? Even when societies make an attempt to discursively recognize transpeople, non-binary transgender subjects are typically not included in that recognition, as briefly examined in the earlier sections of this introductory chapter and in
Chapter Two. Why are non-binary transgender subjects thoughtlessly and/or intentionally excluded from both typical and “inclusive” definitions of trans subjectivity?

This dissertation explores the undeniable emergence of transgender subjects and what I refer to as the (binary) “transgender metanarrative” in popular culture. In particular, I examine how this “transgender metanarrative” is one that is founded on a narrow and homogeneous understanding of transpeople in line with the binary. Transgender is swiftly becoming a cultural phenomenon in the West and beyond, but non-binary trans subjects have been excluded and pushed deeper into the margins. I believe that popular culture, particularly in the form of filmic texts, holds an unparalleled public influence that participates in this exclusionary practice, but also helps to counter it.

My dissertation focuses on the articulation of a narrow and homogeneous form of a transgender subject via forms of popular culture, mostly fiction and non-fiction film and an autoethnography of disidentification (expanding on Jose Esteban Muñoz’s theory of disidentification), to argue that non-binary transgender people are being effectively excluded from the move towards recognizing transpeople. This exclusion in popular culture feeds a problematic form of exclusion taking place within wider social discourse about transgender people. In short, societal understanding towards transpeople is focused almost exclusively on one homogeneous group: binary transgender people who typically transition from one sex to another in order to align their born-in-the-wrong assigned-sexed body with the gender identity that they were born with (transmen and transwomen). This dissertation makes a critical feminist intervention in the areas of trans studies, feminist film studies, cultural studies and feminist philosophy to fill the gap in research that focuses on the exclusionary production of non-binary transpeople. My work will actualize a third-space in theory by applying the outcomes of queer theory and sexuality in a way that we can understand what
non-binary is to gender. I also develop non-binary trans theory by examining the exclusionary discursive production of transgender homogeneity in popular culture texts, particularly fiction and non-fiction (documentary) film, but I will also briefly touch upon television shows, video games and advertising examples.

My critical feminist intervention employs strategic essentialism to argue for a third-space of recognition for transpeople who identify outside of the binary of sex and gender. I will make a distinction between binary transgender and non-binary transgender, even though this reiterates an essentialist and binaristic form of subjectivity, because this distinction is necessary to ameliorate mainstream discourse’s focus on binary transpeople either as transmen or transwomen. This ideologically-produced archetype of transgender has been disseminated to society in an essentialist form focused on the belief that all transgender people are transsexual. My intertextual (in the forms of the written word—both argument and autoethnographic stories—and the visual, in the form of photographs) and interdisciplinary methodology aims to offer a contribution to the evolution of trans studies. I argue that it is imperative that feminist/gender studies and other areas of the academy recognize the importance of re-conceptualizing gender beyond the binary. Butler has worked at length to theorize gender beyond the binary, but more works need to be done to theorize a space of identification and expression. This work needs to occur in theory in order for an actual articulation in reality.

My dissertation also critically intervenes in the archaic and normative structure of doctoral work by figuring in the visual as another way (beyond the textual) to write my embodied and embedded research and analysis. The visual and the written will complement each other in ways that deconstruct the literal in hegemonic language. In particular, I will further feminist positionality and autoethnography (as a form of writing cultures of gender)
in visual form to challenge the metanarrative by including self-portraits of my non-binary identity to simultaneously disrupt and engage the reader throughout the text. The reader is invited to read and analyze me as they analyze, criticize and learn from what is written. I am a non-binary trans text and my visibility is an evocative and hybrid enunciation, in line with the work of Muñoz on disidentification, which I will illustrate later in the dissertation.

Here in Chapter One, I have provided a brief overview of transgender/trans studies terminology and language (sex, gender, gender identity and gender expression, trans, transgender, transsexual, non-binary) and have given a brief genealogical investigation of the term “transgender” to examine how “transgender” has evolved. This introductory chapter has also clearly outlined my thesis: that a production and propagation of transgender homogeneity occurs in a complex system of pop culture texts (specifically fiction and non-fiction films), social discourse and language that feed into an exclusionary discursive transgender metanarrative. This metanarrative limits and restricts diversity, particularly for transpeople whom identify beyond the binary as neither men nor women.

Chapter Two examines the undeniable emergence of a global transgender phenomenon by illustrating an extensive list of popular culture texts that support my thesis.° I trace the transgender phenomenon (binary and some examples of non-binary), which is swiftly gaining prominence in our contemporary time, especially within North America, particularly the recent viral movements involving Caitlyn Jenner and Miley Cyrus, among

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° I say global here because gender and, in some places, transgender are arguably the most pervasive and monolithic cultural scripts across countries and cultures globally. I recognize that gender is always specific to a time (history) and place (culture), and that alternatives to a binary understanding of gender/sex have existed and continue to exist in many times and places (such as two-spirited people in some native North American cultures). Nonetheless, as my examples will show, the metanarrative of gender and transgender have worked to colonize and re-binarize gender and transgender identities around the world.
others. In addition, I have highlighted other popular culture texts and legislative changes that provide evidence for the transgender phenomenon.
Image 2.1 BIRTH © Joshua M. Ferguson 2016.
Chapter Three acts as a literature review that combines a variety of theories both to expose the foundational underpinnings of the Transgender Metanarrative and show how it might be challenged. I examine Althusser’s ideologies, Foucault’s theory of the “confession” in relation to identity politics and biopower and biopolitics, and Spinoza’s concept of “multibodies” to suggest that the ideological and biopolitically induced Transgender Metanarrative constrains non-binary subjects. Transgender emerged as a “third-way” beyond the binary, but it was swiftly consumed by binary-based frameworks and remolded ideologically and biopolitically to represent only subjects who are line with the sex and gender binary, similar to the grand narrative of [cis]gender. The cisgender and transgender binary is also an aspect of this problem whereby all areas of trans discourse operate under an either/or framework. Consequently, I argue that the “transgender metanarrative” has held non-binary subjects captive. Butler’s theory of hailing, following Althusser and the notion of intelligible subjects through speech acts, also assists in understanding the pervasive effects of the transgender metanarrative. In line with Butler’s thinking about gender, I revise one of her statements by replacing gender with transgender: the acts of transgender “create the idea of [transgender] and without them there would not be [transgender] in a way that people understand it” (“Performative Acts” 522). Therefore, the stories of transgender, circulated through popular culture, create the very essence of it that becomes hegemonic. The sensationalized autobiographical imperative of transpeople (as a linear transition from beginning, though middle, to end), often focused and fixated on by the mass media, articulates the singular intelligibility of transgender as a transman or transwoman. The interpellation of trans subjectivity sediments positionality in line with the binary. This thesis will disrupt structuralist binary-based understandings of gender and transgender to signal a poststructuralist walk into the unknown—but known for some of us—realm of recognizing
genders beyond man and woman. The key theorists and philosophers mentioned above will enable a poststructuralist lens for deconstructing the limitations of gender. This research will act as the foundational lens that will be employed to investigate the various areas of transgender discourse in popular culture outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter Four will explore areas of popular culture in relation to the homogenization of transgender subjects, particularly filmic texts. The non-fiction and fiction filmic texts in this section will be analyzed using feminist film theory (Cynthia Fuchs, Jane M. Gaines, Christie Milliken, John Phillips, Susan Stryker, Trinh T. Minh-Ha) as well as the theorists discussed in Chapter Three. I analyze these fiction film texts from U.S. and Canadian cinema: *Boy Meets Girl* (Eric Schaeffer 2014), *The Danish Girl* (Tom Hooper 2015), *Transamerica* (Duncan Tucker 2006), *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberly Pierce 1999), *Dallas Buyer’s Club* (Jean Marc Vallée 2013), *Laurence Anyways* (Xavier Dolan 2013), and *Tangerine* (Sean Baker 2015). These non-fiction film texts are analyzed: *100% Woman* (Karen Duthie 2004), *Becoming Ayden* (CBC 2004), *Becoming Chaz* (Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato 2011), *Boy I am* (Sam Feder and Julie Hollar 2006), *Girl Inside* (Maya Gallus 2007), *Middle Sexes* (Antony Thomas 2005), and *She’s a Boy I Knew* (Gwen Haworth 2007). How does the powerful influence of cinema on society and culture contribute to the metanarrative of transgender homogeneity? What are the representational thematic motifs of transgender discourse within these filmic texts? How do these representational tropes work to narrow an understanding of trans diversity? Chapter Four begins to put pressure on the normative understanding of the term transgender by analyzing binary trans fiction and non-fiction film. I employ Teresa De Lauretis’ theory of the

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7 My fiction film analysis avoids some of the traditionally studied transgender films such as *Silence of the Lambs*, *The Crying Game*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, *Psycho*, and *Dressed to Kill* and instead focuses on less-discussed contemporary films that deserve full analysis.
technology of gender to theorize a transgender ideological cinematic apparatus that works in synergy with the Transgender Metanarrative to deploy the film image’s accessible representation, which becomes the real interpellation. The ideological cinematic apparatus, theorized in my earlier work, deploys a theoretical framework to analyze cinema’s exclusionary production in representing queer and trans people in problematic and hegemonic ways that homogenize diversity. I also engage with Dyer and Halberstam’s theories of stereotypes to assist in the articulation of thematic motifs in these fiction and non-fiction films that work to disseminate the Transgender Metanarrative to society. Furthermore, I discuss the debate about ‘cis’/non-trans actors playing trans roles and suggest that this debate limits our understanding of gender in and around the binary by failing to take into account gender expression while simultaneously assuming that people are not trans based on visible markers. There is a lack of trans perspectives written by transpeople on trans cinema. This area of study is largely overlooked in trans studies. My film analysis thus contributes to the fields of gender studies, trans studies and film studies. I argue that the binary trans fiction films analyzed all represent, in various ways, four main thematic motifs (double-vision/trans gaze, telling THE trans story, body mapping, traveling subjects) that perpetuate the transgender metanarrative.

Chapter Five will examine filmic texts that are moving towards a recognition of trans subjects beyond man and woman. In particular, I will examine my own latest short fiction film, *Limina* (Halbedl & Ferguson 2016), as an example of how film can work to challenge the exclusionary cinematic production evidenced in Chapter Four. These filmic examples will be presented to highlight the potential for popular culture texts to disrupt the production of transgender subjects in homogeneous form by challenging binary-based representation. These films present non-binary trans subjectivities in terms of gender identity and/or
expression. I analyze these fiction films: *Limina, Queen Christina* (Rouben Mamoulian 1933), *The Girl King* (Mika Kaurismäki 2015), *Orlando* (Sally Potter 1993), *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (John Cameron Mitchell 2001), *Albert Nobbs* (Rodrigo Garcia 2011), and *Victor/Victoria* (Blake Edwards 1982). In addition, these non-fiction films are analyzed: *Three to Infinity* (Lonny Shavelson 2015), *Juggling Gender* (Tami Gold 1992), and *Still Juggling* (Tami Gold 2008).

This chapter works in contrast to Chapter Four by analyzing the emergence of non-binary trans popular culture. I employ Butler’s theories of language in addition to queer theory to theorize an understanding of non-binary gender beyond the binary. The films analyzed in this section and the theory posed in relation to queer theory and gender “wreak havoc on the organizing principle” (Castricano) of gender and the transgender metanarrative. I explore the liminal, third/in-between, spaces of gender subjectivity in these fiction films (*Limina, Queen Christina, The Girl King, Orlando, Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Albert Nobbs and Victor/Victoria*). I call these films “new trans cinema” not in relation to the time period released but in relation to their disruptive representational strategies that work against the transgender metanarrative. These films focus on fluid temporality and spatiality, and multiple levels of narration to tell stories founded in fluidity, and in ways that challenge the vulnerability of the body. Instead of the body being revealed and policed in line with the binary, there is gender ambiguity in most of these films. Furthermore, the gaze is complicated in such a way that a multidirectional gaze is highlighted rather than one that objectifies the trans character. Some of these films represent non-binary trans identity whereas others only represent non-binary gender expression, but I have highlighted already how both gender identity and gender expression can articulate trans subjectivity. Among the non-binary trans films to be analyzed are three non-fiction works: *Three to Infinity, Juggling*
**Gender and Still Juggling.** These films work to represent non-binary transpeople in rich and diverse ways that raise important questions about the limits and possibilities of gender identity and gender expression.

Chapter Six uses all of the theoretical and textual data from the earlier chapters to work towards a theory of non-binary (‘third-space’) subjectivity by engaging with my own feminist and trans positionality both in written and visual form.

First, I employ what I call an autoethnography of disidentification and self-reflexivity in this chapter as a queer method of positionality and cultural reflexivity. There is potential for autoethnography—typically employed in qualitative sociological and anthropological research—as a queer methodology for trans studies. Holman Jones and Adams state that, “my experience – our experience – could be your experience. My experience – our experience – could reframe your experience. My experience – our experience – could politicize your experience and could motivate, mobilize you, and us to action” (198). Bodies are “immersed in, and fixed by, texts” (Holman Jones and Adams 211), so how can autoethnography as a form of writing with the subject related to positionality counter the transgender metanarrative? I engage with myself to challenge the metanarrative throughout this dissertation in visual form by including self-portraits of my non-binary identity to simultaneously disrupt and engage the reader. Chapter Six works as a form of queer methodology to reboot and recode thinking about gender and trans identity and expression beyond the binary. Some of this chapter is fragmented, atypical in structure and composed of short essays to put Derrida’s theory of deconstruction into action as a way of engaging with a form of petits récits. How is life experienced for a non-binary transperson and what does it look like?
My hybridity, existing in a “third-space” as a non-binary trans subject, will enable positionality as an intervening discourse to hinge “experience and analysis, ambiguity and clarity, dialogue and debate, accessibility and academic activism, just stories and high theory” (Adams and Holman Jones 109). Autoethnography enables me to make visible the way culture is written by and for the subject (visual and written contributions), specifically trans culture in relation to reflexivity. I will use autoethnography in new forms in relation to the engagement of my subjectivity in visual spaces by including still images of myself exposing my non-binary subjectivity. I will also reflect here in this chapter on my experience as a non-binary trans filmmaker in creating my short film Limina, which works against the Transgender Metanarrative in cinematic form. Finally, this chapter will also devise theoretical threads of inquiry for the articulation of gender identities beyond man and woman.

The conclusion will summarize the dissertation’s findings and limitations and seek to pose new questions about trans studies.
Chapter Two:

The Proliferation of a Transgender Monolith: Phenomenon(s) of Transgender/Trans Discourse

“Transmen, transwomen: that’s what transgender has come to mean today. Which presented a problem to me because I’m non binary.” –Kate Bornstein (Kate Bornstein Keynote)

Many scholars and activists have noted a recent emergence of transgender and trans discourse, particularly in North American popular culture. I believe it is important to point out this phenomenon as a way of highlighting how the dominant discussion around transgender revolves around a monolithic notion of being trans. Lucas Cassidy Crawford asks: “what kind of phenomenon is ‘transgender’ if it exists without hormones, surgery, or the extensive medical documentation that accompanies these identifiably trans procedures?” (138). Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura in their Introduction to the Transgender Studies 2.0 anthology include a Google books search they conducted from 2000-2008 that uses the terms transexual, transsexual (alternative spelling variation), transvestite, transgender and genderqueer. Their results indicate that 2500 books have been published with “transgender” or “transsexual” in the title and that “nearly 40,000 academic articles reference transgender topics…as do approximately two million newspaper and periodical stories. According to a recent poll, 91 percent of people living in the U.S.A. report that they have heard the term transgender” (2).

They also note that “since about 1992, transgender has experienced a meteoric rise in popularity compared to other familiar terms for describing gender nonconforming practices” (2). Stryker also conducted a Google search in 2008 for the number of hits referring to these terms: transgender, transsexual, transvestite, drag queen, drag king and genderqueer. I then conducted similar searches in 2012, 2015 and 2016 to explore the increasing phenomenon of
trans culture. (Note that I added ‘non-binary’ for the 2015 and 2016 searches that was absent in Stryker’s and my earlier searches.) See below for the results.

**Table 1 – Google Search Hits for Trans Terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>2008 Google search hits (Stryker)</th>
<th>2012 Google search hits (Ferguson)</th>
<th>2015 Google search hits (Ferguson)</th>
<th>2016 Google search hits (Ferguson)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>7.3 million</td>
<td>37.8 million</td>
<td>84.4 million</td>
<td>59 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transsexual</td>
<td>6.4 million</td>
<td>39.3 million</td>
<td>17.4 million</td>
<td>17.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transvestite</td>
<td>3.1 million</td>
<td>16.4 million</td>
<td>3.6 million</td>
<td>3.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drag Queen</td>
<td>1.9 million</td>
<td>26.7 million</td>
<td>18.3 million</td>
<td>21.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drag King</td>
<td>200k</td>
<td>28 million</td>
<td>26.2 million</td>
<td>23.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>200k</td>
<td>1.7 million</td>
<td>708k</td>
<td>774k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Binary*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>12.2 million</td>
<td>9 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2** Google Search hits for Trans Terms: 2008 stats by Stryker; 2012, 2015 and 2016 stats by Ferguson.

There is an undeniable proliferation of transgender searches from 2008 to 2016, which has now eclipsed all other trans-related categories. Of interest is the amount of search hits relating to non-binary. Calling to mind the linguistic specificities, conflicts and potential diversity within the term transgender, then, how does the transgender phenomenon contribute to the exclusionary erasure of non-binary trans subjects? Is there a phenomenon of transgender without the leitmotif of bodily transition? I will articulate this question in relation to my thesis in the next section of this introductory chapter, but will keep this
question in view during this section as I proceed to provide a variety of evidence for this “transgender” phenomenon.

From *TIME* magazine’s “The Transgender Tipping Point: America’s next civil rights frontier” cover story by Katy Steinmetz featuring Laverne Cox (June 9, 2014) to the emergence of Caitlyn Jenner in 2015 as the most famous transperson in the world, transgender has cemented itself as one of the twenty-first century’s prominent societal discourses. High-profile transpeople are in the societal spotlight, such as Laverne Cox, Caitlyn Jenner, Janet Mock, Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski, Martine Rothblatt, Andreja Pejić, Jamie Clayton, and most recently Miley Cyrus, who considers herself to be gender-fluid (Allison Glock). Steinmetz notes that an estimated “1.5 million Americans” identify as transgender (Steinmetz, “The Transgender Tipping Point”). Laverne Cox states that, “We are in a place now where more and more trans people want to come forward and say, ‘This is who I am.’” (Steinmetz “The Transgender Tipping Point” 40). The article features binary transpeople and only briefly discusses a gender spectrum. This article came before Caitlyn Jenner’s arrival on the pop culture scene that began with her Diane Sawyer interview on ABC.

The “Bruce Jenner: The Interview” special was broadcast on April 24, 2015 and featured an edited interview conducted by Diane Sawyer. Seventeen million people viewed the interview in the U.S.A alone (Rick Kissell n.p.), marking it as the most widely watched “trans-related” event in history. The interview begins by creating a mystique around Jenner, featuring blurred images and early childhood photos. The focus of the interview is on Jenner’s story of coming to terms with being “stuck” in the wrong body. Interestingly, Jenner states during the interview that she is “stuck in the middle…which way do I go?” (Sawyer). The interview presents various trans subjects forty minutes into the program, but
they all identify within the binary, particularly Janet Mock, Jennifer Finn-Boyley, and Kristin Beck. There is an emphasis on Jenner’s story of moving from “one gender to another.” And, there is a fixation on this switch because the interview is only presenting two possible gender options as the reality for transpeople. A clear focus is cemented on the transition or the re-emergence of Jenner from man to woman, and this is further emphasized through a death motif where one must bid “farewell to Bruce Jenner” and Sawyer wonders about the newborn Caitlyn: “how would she look?” (Sawyer). The interview illustrates that the transition is a type of death whereby one subject dies and another emerges. How does this interview, arguably the most prominent pop culture text about transpeople ever produced, contribute to the thesis outlined in the next section? First, here are other popular culture Jenner moments that deserve to be included to illuminate this transgender phenomenon. I am including these Jenner moments because her emergence in popular culture has undeniably elevated the discourse of transpeople to an unprecedented level of attention.

The Sawyer interview was preceded by two hour-long E! Channel Keeping up with the Kardashians specials entitled “All About Bruce,” where the Kardashian and Jenner families come to grips with Jenner’s change, complete with shock, sadness, frustration, and then eventual love and acceptance. This two hour long special received 4.2 million viewers (a three year high for the parent series) (Michael O’Connell n.p.). Jenner proceeded to come out as Caitlyn Jenner in Vanity Fair’s July 2015 issue with a cover story entitled “Call me Caitlyn,” written by Buzz Bassinger and shot by Annie Leibovitz. The cover features Jenner in a pose that highlights her bodily modification and transition. This Vanity Fair issue went viral around the world and has the best newsstand numbers for the magazine since 2011
Recently, *Vanity Fair* and Condé Nast have published a special edition *Vanity Fair: Trans America* focusing on gender identity and expression and featuring “groundbreaking stories on the transgender community’s pioneers” (Caitlyn Jenner, Renée Richards, Chaz Bono and Laverne Cox). All of the transpeople featured in this groundbreaking special edition identify within the binary.

This special edition begins with a problematic article written by Buzz Bissinger about transgender history, but it is, in fact, a rewriting of history by washing away any signs of non-binary transpeople. This exclusive focus on binary transgender people suggests that transpeople only identify as a man or woman. In fact, all of the transpeople cited in the Bassinger article about tracing “transgender history” are transwomen.

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8 In fact, the issue had “432,000 single copy sales, making it the highest-selling cover in nearly five years, *Vanity Fair* said. The magazine had 186,619 average single copy sales for the first half of the year and average total circulation of nearly 1.2 million” (Tadena).

9 I do not want to assume that all of the transpeople featured in this *Vanity Fair* special edition are binary transgender, but the editorial reaffirms this by only using he/she and transgender man or woman when describing them. There is also a concern that some of these transpeople mentioned in the article may have been constrained to fit the metanarrative that the special edition seems to elevate above all other trans identities.
Image 3.2 CHRYSSALLIS © Joshua M. Ferguson 2016.
VICE News reports that “Bruce Jenner’s Coming Out is the Millenial Moon Landing” by explaining the complexities of trans lives, “a foreign topic for many Americans” (Mitchell Sunderland n.p.). The Sawyer interview, Vanity Fair, and Keeping up with the Kardashians special were then followed by an E! Docuseries entitled I am Cait, which premiered on July 26, 2015 to 2.7 million viewers, and grossed 6.2 million viewers with four showings that night (Michael O’Connell n.p.). Jenner’s Vanity Fair cover was also matched by her arrival on social media. Jenner’s Twitter account @Caitlyn_Jenner went live on June 1, 2015 and she received 420k followers within hours of starting the account. She created two posts on June 1st and they both received a record number of retweets and favorites. A few hours after tweeting her Vanity Fair cover image and a tweet about her struggle to live her “true self,” Jenner received 72k and 101k retweets respectively. On August 20th 2015, the retweets amounted to 300k and 400k respectively, which is unprecedented on Twitter (Twitter).

Many of the entertainment news articles surrounding Jenner’s “coming out” focus on the transition from Bruce to Caitlyn (Lynette Rice “Keeping up with Caitlyn Jenner” n.p.). Jenner is now admirably creating awareness on I am Cait with guests, including many notable transwomen, but also transpeople who identify outside of the binary such as Kate Bornstein. The docu-series is heavily focused on Jenner’s transition, but it also takes aim at important issues affecting the trans community, particularly violence and hate crimes, suicide, housing, education and health care, and trans youth and their families.
Image 3.3 CHRYSSALLIS © Joshua M. Ferguson 2016.
Jenner’s meteoric rise as the most famous transperson in the world, particularly in the area of reality TV, is complemented by an extensive number of other notable transgender pop culture TV moments. An *Entertainment Weekly* article entitled “Trans Stories Find a Home on Reality TV” highlights the emergence of trans-related reality TV programs, particularly Discovery Life’s *New Girls on the Block* (featuring six transwomen in various stages of transition in the U.S.), TLC’s *I am Jazz* (about 14-year-old YouTube star Jazz Jennings who is self-identified as a trans-girl), and ABC Family’s *Becoming Us* (a real-life version of Netflix’s *Transparent*, which follows 17-year old Chicago teen Ben whose Dad Charlie undergoes gender confirmation surgery to become Carly) (Lynette Rice). Tyra Banks is set to produce a transgender docuseries for VH1 entitled *TransAmerica* featuring a group of Chicago transwomen, most notably Carmen Carrera (Lesley Goldberg n.p.). Julie Vu, a Vancouver-based Canadian transwoman, will star in an OUTtv sitcom “as a transgender woman rebuilding her life after coming out of the closet” (Etan Vlessing). The U.S. version of *Big Brother* made history in the 2015 summer season by featuring its first transgender woman contestant, Audrey Middleton (Elizabeth Wagmeister n.p.).

Furthermore, other TV texts that have featured binary transgender people are: *CSI, The Cleveland Show, Nip/Tuck, Grey’s Anatomy, Cold Case, Two and a Half Men, Californication, House of Lies, Ugly Betty, Degrassi, Glee, Hit and Miss, All My Children, The Bold and the Beautiful, Bones, Coronation Street, Sense 8, Just Shoot Me, Law and Order, The L Word, NCIS, Orange is the New Black, Transparent, and Orphan Black*. This extensive list containing television shows over the past ten years provides clear evidence that there has been a recent proliferation of binary trans characters on TV. However, many of these representations are negative, portraying the trans character as the victim, killer/villain, sex worker, and/or containing anti-trans slurs, language, and dialogue in relation to the
characters (Matt Kane n.p.). There are also positive examples of representation from the list above, particularly spearheaded by binary-trans actors like Laverne Cox who are arguing for better representation in TV and Film. Transwomen are now achieving a spotlight in Hollywood that is unprecedented. At the 2016 Screen Actors Guild Awards, Evan Ross Katz with NewNowNext writes that “Trans Women Dominate The Red Carpet At This Year’s SAG Awards,” specifically focusing on Our Lady J, Trace Lysette, Laverne Cox, Hari Nef and Alexandra Billings appearances at the event. This visibility is important and necessary; however, how is this hyper visibility on binary trans women contributing to the transgender metanarrative?

Binary transgender people have been reaching society via pop culture in other ways in addition to the television examples evidenced earlier. Transman Aydian Dowling almost became Men’s Health’s first “trans hunk” to be featured on the cover, as the Daily Beast states that Dowling was on course “to be Men’s Health November 2015 cover model, beating out the competition with more than 14,000 votes, almost double what the guy in second place has” (Gabe Bergado n.p.). Dowling traveled to New York for a photo-shoot in August 2015 as one of five finalists in the Men’s Health cover competition (Joseph Patrick McCormick n.p.) and ended up placing second in the competition. Bond girl, Tula, from For Your Eyes Only (1981) and also featured in an early Playboy pictorial, has recently been featured in a Playboy online article entitled “Bond Girl Tula was the First Transgender Woman to Bare it All in Playboy Magazine,” illustrating that a mainstream pornographic magazine is catering to the transgender phenomenon, at least that which is founded on the binary (Shane Michael Singh n.p.). The fashion industry is also capitalizing on this recent fixation on binary transpeople, particularly the Winter 2014-2015 cover of CANDY magazine, which featured “some of the world’s most famous transgender women.” (James
Nichols, “CANDY magazine” n.p.), and Bruce Weber’s Barneys’ spring 2014 campaign featuring seventeen transgender models (Alice Gregory n.p.).

The focus thus far has been on the emergence of binary transgender people in pop culture. However, gender-fluidity and gender non-conformity in line with non-binary trans discourse is beginning to emerge as well that deserves mention.

The most viral example of gender-fluidity and gender-nonconformity happened in 2014 at the Eurovision Song Contest in Copenhagen when drag queen Conchita Wurst won the grand prize for Austria. Thomas Neuwirth is openly gay and AMAB-bodied, but does not identify as trans. Neuwirth’s character, Conchita Wurst, personifies a visual breakdown of the binary with full make-up and hair akin to many drag queens, but with a full beard and moustache that challenges assumptions of binary gender.

Gender-fluidity has also been dominating the runway in 2015 (Gregory n.p.). Gregory notes that in the Winter 2015 season, Gucci, Proenza Schouler, and Chanel sent men down womenswear runways, and Givenchy, Giorgio Armani, Yves Saint Laurent, Raf Simons and Moschino did the opposite, casting women in menswear shows (Gregory n.p.). Proenza Schouler cofounder Lazaro Hernandez states that, “Nobody cares anymore. The distinction between man and woman is disappearing, aesthetically at least” (Vogue 2015 n.p.). Stores are now introducing gender-neutral sections and doing away with delineated clothing and toys based on the binary: Selfridges in the UK (gender-neutral labeling), ZARA’s “Ungendered” clothing line (Madelyn Chung), Future is the Future (gender-neutral online store based in Toronto) McDonalds (beginning to examine their guidelines to avoid
classifying toys as “boy or girl”) (Jessica Samakow); Target (non-gendered policy for kids toys, which has angered some customers) (Cavan Sieczkowski n.p.).\(^{10}\)

\(^{10}\) It is interesting (and unfortunate) to note that some of these gender-neutral clothing lines are actually reiterating the binary-based distinctions of clothing. ZARA’s line in particular consists of T-shirts, tanks, jeans and sweatshirts – not very groundbreaking in terms of clothing for AMAB-bodied people (Madelyn Chung). Chung states that “a lot of the pieces in the collection are typical ‘menswear’ items that are often worn by women as well.”
Many high-profile celebrities have come out in support of gender-fluidity and expanding beyond binary understandings of gender, such as Susan Sarandon, who exclaimed, “I’m so excited these days by the fluidity of gender” ("Susan Sarandon: ‘I’m So Excited’" n.p.). However, the most famous person to come out in support of the trans community is Miley Cyrus. She discusses her gender-fluidity (or gender-neutrality) in the *Marie Claire* September 2015 cover story by Allison Glock. She founded the Happy Hippie Foundation that featured a project in 2015 advocating for people across the gender spectrum (Katy Steinmetz “You Can Just Be” n.p.). Cyrus’s social justice mission for this project is to teach “America that there’s more to gender than deciding someone is a girl or boy in the delivery room – and supporting people across the gender spectrum” (Steinmetz “You Can Just Be” n.p.). Cyrus produced a photo exhibit that works in collaboration with Instagram to feature a wide range of transpeople, both binary and non-binary. This Miley Cyrus initiated project is arguably the most high-profile attention on non-binary transpeople in pop culture, with some of Cyrus’ images on Instagram receiving over 200,000 likes on each image as of January 1st, 2016.

One of the non-binary transpeople to be featured in Cyrus’ campaign is Tyler Ford who identifies as an agender (genderless) person. Ford wrote an article for *The Guardian* published on August 7, 2015. Ford writes that they first came out as a transgender man and then came out as a non-binary person: “someone who does not identify with either binary gender (man or woman)” ("My Life Without Gender” n.p.). Ford states that agender allows them to have the freedom to “exist as a person without being confined by the limits of the western gender binary.” Ford is a friend of pop star Ariana Grande and is featured in many of her social media posts (Grande has 35.1 million Twitter followers and 54.2 million
Instagram followers as of January 2016), so Ford’s reach as a non-binary person is promising in introducing this part of the trans community to the transgender phenomenon.

Other prominent gender-fluid popular culture moments include Jaden Smith, son of Will Smith and Jada Pinkett-Smith who went viral in April 2015 when he was photographed wearing a dress in public. Smith wrote on Instagram: “Went to TopShop to Buy Some Girl Clothes, I Mean ‘Clothes’” (Lauren Tuck n.p.). Ruby Rose, an actor from *Orange is the New Black* went viral in 2015 identifying with gender-fluidity. Rose made a short film in 2014 entitled *Break Free* about gender-fluidity that had roughly 11 million views in August 2015. Rose has publically declared that they wanted GCS (gender confirmation surgery) but changed their mind and that they “just wanted to be more comfortable in [their] own skin” (Nick Duffy, “Changed My Mind” n.p.). Finally, Marvel/Disney’s film *Doctor Strange* adapted from the comic book *Dr. Strange*, to be released in 2017, features a character named the Ancient One who is played by androgynous actor Tilda Swinton. In an interview conducted about the film, the author Clark Collis raises a discussion about the gender of the character. Collis notes how the comics depict the Ancient One as a man, so there seems to be some doubt about whether Swinton’s depiction of the character in the film is female: Swinton states “I think it’s all in the eye of the beholder…You know, your gender comes out of the mouth of the person who’s addressing you.” (Collis n.p.). In April of 2016, a viral moment introducing non-binary discourse to the United States and beyond occurred when a non-binary student came out to President Barack Obama in central London, England (Jim Waterson). The student “urged the US president to do more to help transgender people around the world” (Waterson). Maria Munir told President Obama: “I’m about to do

\[\text{11 I want to note here that although the casting choice of Tilda Swinton as the Ancient One is interesting for gender, it is problematic because the Ancient One in the comic-books is an Asian character and Tilda is caucasian.}\]
something terrifying, which is I’m coming out to you as a non-binary person, which means that I don’t fit because I’m from a Pakistani-Muslim background which inevitably has complications” (Waterson). Maria agitated further by asking how President Obama could legislate beyond what is accepted as the LGBTQ rights movement, especially for people “who are outside of social norms” (Waterson). These examples present a partial picture of the emergence of a discourse around gender-fluidity and gender being beyond the binary that exists in popular culture.
Virtual spaces, particularly video games and social media, have also contributed to the trend of non-binary trans discourse in popular culture. Non-binary characters include: Maevaris Tilani from the popular Dragon Age universe; Toad from Super Mario Brothers (Nintendo claims they do not identify along the gender binary) (James Nichols “Doesn’t Identify Along” n.p.); and Facebook’s decision to include custom gender options beyond “male” or “female.” Facebook introduced they/them/their as an optional pronoun and “50 new terms for users to select from when identifying their gender” (Kristin Russo and Dannielle Owens-Reid n.p.). The most significant video game popular culture moment of the year 2016 with Pokémon Go also contributed to non-binary discourse by erasing the binary labels of man/woman or male/female in the character creation screen prior to beginning your journey in the game. Typically, games with avatars ask for players to identify their character in line with the binary; however, Pokémon Go asks players to “choose a ‘style’ for their avatar, not ‘gender’” (Nigel Tan). Consequently, “non-binary players do not have to worry about gender labels as they enter into the world of Pokémon” (Tan). The decision has been praised by fans from around the world (Tan) and could signal a shift in the usage of the binary by video game companies to force non-binary trans players to pick one or the other. Pokémon fans argue that Pokémon have three genders (with genderless as the third), “so why can’t trainers?” (Tan). The Sims games franchise also “removed all gender barriers” in its games as well as Tan states that “new players now have no gender limits when customizing their characters.” Electronic Arts produces The Sims games, which is arguably one of the most powerful video game manufacturers in the world, so this is a very encouraging step in introducing non-binary discourse to this area of popular culture.

Legislative and administrative changes around the world have also introduced people to non-binary discourse. *The Oxford English Dictionary* has introduced a new title for
transgender people: Mx (Barbara Herman n.p.). Sweden added the gender-neutral pronoun “hen” to their lexicon in 2015 (AFP Stockholm). New Zealand now allows people to identify as “gender diverse.” “The government’s official data collection body Statistics NZ announced the change” (Duffy, “Recognizing Gender Diverse People” n.p.). New Zealand also offers “Gender X” passports for people who identify as neither male or female (Duffy, “Recognizing Gender Diverse People” n.p.). In Germany, a recent law introduced a third sex category on birth certificates and would enable “interdeterminate gender,” and passports will introduce X for intersex holders (BBC News; Ellen K. Feder n.p.). While this change in Germany conflates sex and gender, it still allows people to identify beyond the binary. Nepal has recognized a third gender since 2007 (United Nations Development Programme n.p.). Furthermore the “Australia high court has ruled that New South Wales must recognize a third gender” after a long running case in that country (Helen Davidson n.p.). Davidson states that the “Australian Capital Territory is currently the only Australian jurisdiction to recognize a third category of gender, although commonwealth-issued passports do.” The University of Vermont has added gender-neutral options to the information system (Julie Scelfo n.p.), but the most significant non-binary cultural moment in the U.S. in terms of legislation occurred in June of 2016 when an Oregon court ruled that ‘nonbinary’ is a legal gender (Mary Emily O’Hara n.p. and Jacob Tobia n.p.). This move will challenge federal policy (O’Hara n.p.) as non-binary identified Jamie Shupe requested the gender identity change in a “petition for sex change, as the court calls it” (O’Hara n.p.). Legal experts attest to the fact that the Oregon court “decision is the first time a court in the U.S. has ruled that nonbinary is a legal gender” (O’Hara n.p.). This is an important legal precedent that could have legislative implications for the U.S., Canada and beyond in recognizing non-binary genders.
Canadian couple Kathy Witterick and David Stocker’s decision to allow their child Storm to self-identify with the gender of their choosing went viral in a *Toronto Star (The Star)* article by Jayme Poisson on May 21, 2011. Poisson wrote a follow-up article on the family on December 26, 2011 and states that within days of the first article’s publication “Storm’s image…appeared online, on televisions and in newspapers around the world” (“The ‘genderless’ baby” n.p.). In another follow-up in 2016 on the Stocker-Witterick family, Storm now identifies with the pronoun she/her/hers while their middle child Jazz identifies as a trans-girl and eldest Kio identifies as non-binary and uses gender-neutral pronouns they/them/their (Botelho-Urbanski). The enforcement of binary gender in childhood is one of the most pervasive components of the gender indoctrination of human beings into the intelligible system of gender. I will explore later in this dissertation with my short film *Limina* how gender-freedom in childhood enables children to be their own gender identity rather than being forced into a position within the binary.

Canada has introduced significant legislation, especially in the year 2016, to work towards the recognition of non-binary people; however, it still lags behind some of the countries around the world (discussed above) that have introduced legislation to recognize a third-space for gender. Trans Canadians can self-identify on citizenship documents without SRS (GRS), a change that came into effect in February 2015 under new reforms from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Lauren Strapagiel n.p.); however, there are still only two options, in line with the binary, to choose from when identifying. Canada has not moved forward with explicit legislation to recognize gender beyond the binary, but there has been public criticism of the constraint in documents that force non-binary people to choose

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12 I want to acknowledge here that although Canada lags behind many countries in terms of both binary and non-binary trans recognition and legislation, the country was one of the first to recognize gender-based oppression, particularly LGBT-related, on refugee determination.
between male/man or female/woman and pieces of legislation and document changes that could open the door for non-binary legislation. In particular, non-binary transperson Quinn Nelson appeared on CBC TV’s *Power and Politics* on January 6\(^{th}\), 2016 to argue for a third option for gender on the Canadian census (Kupfer n.p.). Quinn states that “as a non-binary person, often when I fill out forms there’s only two options given to me and that’s not enough for me” (Kupfer n.p.). Nelson took their argument to the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada and the census, Navdeep Bains. Bains did not respond to Nelson, but a Deputy chief statistician said that that the only option that exists for non-binary transpeople in 2016 (since the census had already been printed) is to answer neither male nor male (Kupfer n.p.). This response to Nelson’s appeal to offer a third option in the census in order to acknowledge non-binary people for policy makers, sociologists, and government officials is dismissive, and also perpetuates the conflation of sex and gender as the census asks whether one is male or female gender (male and female refer to sex, not gender).

Nonetheless, Nelson’s appeal did create some visibility and awareness for the recognition of non-binary people in Canada. From June 13\(^{th}\), 2016 onward in Ontario, the provincial government has removed ‘sex’ from health cards and driver’s license holders “will be given the option to display an ‘X’ on their card as their gender identifier” (Ministry of Government and Consumer Services n.p.). The government website notes countries like Australia, NZ and Nepal that have made similar changes. This movement forward in recognizing a space for gender beyond the binary in terms of an ‘X’ or by removing sex altogether signals a wider shift in acknowledging non-binary identity.

In 2016, Canada has moved forward with legislative plans to introduce gender-identity and gender-expression protection into the federal human rights code (Susana Mas & Kalina Laframboise n.p.). “Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in a written statement…that
the government would introduce legislation ‘that will help ensure transgender and other
gender-diverse people can live according to their gender identity, free from discrimination,
and protected from hate propaganda and hate crimes’ (Mas n.p.). Provincially, the Ontario
government passed Bill 33 in 2012 to add explicit protection “against discrimination for
gender identity and gender expression” (Botelho-Urbanski n.p.) and British Columbia did
the same four years later in 2016 (Mike Hager n.p. & Rafferty Baker n.p.). Adding both
gender identity and gender expression in these Canadian laws will not protect both binary
and non-binary trans people. I believe that this Human Rights Code (gender identity and
gender expression) legislation and Ontario’s addition of ‘X’ as a non-binary identifier on
driver’s licenses will open up legal spaces to introduce ‘nonbinary’ gender as a legal gender
in Canada if non-binary transpeople file human rights complaints similar to Jamie Shupe’s
case in Oregon.

Chapter Two has worked to provide extensive evidence for the proliferation of binary
transgender discourse, but I have also noted several popular culture trends emerging on a
smaller-scale that hint at a non-binary discourse that has the potential to disrupt an
exclusionary production of trans subjects vis-à-vis the homogenization and erasure of
diversity.
Image 4.3 COCOON © Joshua M. Ferguson 2016.
Chapter Three

The Linguistic Contest of Transgender and the Ideological and Biopolitically Induced Transgender Metanarrative

Some trans subjects are constrained by identity in relation to sex and gender ideologies that work to capture difference in the term transgender. A hegemonic societal point of view has emerged, one that is founded in gender-based ideologies that consider all transgender people to be either transmen or transwomen in order to challenge a non-binary transgender revolution, which would irrevocably change societal notions of sex, gender and sexuality. The reverberations of this potential revolution would have the power to cause people to question static identities held together by the powerful systems of ideologies, biopower/politics and the workings of the confession to stabilize subjectivity.

The proverbial ‘coming out,’ as an act of speech and self-identification reaffirms the importance of identification to lived experience. People typically construct their ‘selves’ by way of categorization, unification and simplification with clear-cut and universal labels of identification. People often depend upon these categories and stable identities in order to be acknowledged as human (Butler *Undoing Gender*). Furthermore, people usually require these human categories to achieve full citizenship status within nation-states and in turn to access social programs and services. But, is the notion that we control our identities an illusion? A person is not a human if they are neither a woman nor a man; they are absent from the realm of intelligibility and crushed of difference to fit a mould of similarity. So, is my non-binary gender an illusion or are the existing intelligible gender identities illusions? I will explore this theoretical line of inquiry in this chapter and how the historical evolution of the term transgender, especially in relation to the many definitions of transgender, is connected to a wider theoretical debate about identity from the perspectives of queer and
feminist theory. In particular, I argue that the Transgender Metanarrative (grand narrative of being transgender) holds ideological and biopolitical control over non-normative subjects and bodies that would otherwise wreak havoc on the patriarchal and heterosexist binary-based system accepted as the only ‘truth’ by the majority of society.

How are gendered subjects regulated and educated about transgender identity vis-à-vis ideologies? How does the indoctrination of a stable and abiding gender binary impact non-binary transgender people? What are the modes of hailing/interpellation that constrain transgender people? How does the “demand for a narrative – an order, a petition” (Derrida 260, 1991) relate to the metanarrative of transsexuality that impacts a societal understanding of transgender? How has the need to ‘mainstream oneself for equality’ propagated an exclusionary production that has effectively left non-binary transgender out of the fight for societal recognition? In fact, is the ‘politics of difference’ (Sullivan 39) a guise made for us to think that we are embodying a diverse transgender identity when we are actually being erased by a Transgender Metanarrative founded in homogeneity?
The Contest over Transgender: Political Faultlines

There is a clear contest over the term transgender evidenced in academic work, particularly the divide between binary transpeople and non-binary transpeople. I want to illustrate the contest over transgender in this section to assist in the amelioration of problems evidenced by later sections of this chapter where I explore the function of identity. Ultimately, it is sex and gender essentialism that works to solidify gender in its tracks so that identities that would otherwise escape the binary cannot be enunciated. This section will also illustrate the emergence of the term transgender and how its ontology as a term highlights a division between binary and non-binary trans subjects.

Riki Wilchins questions why the recent proliferation of “cultural sensitivity to gender” has been so limited and suggests that this has been funneled into one area: transgenderism (GenderQueer 14).13 David Valentine also examines this emergence of transgender as an umbrella term, but one that may exclude people from an “imagined future of justice and freedom” if they are not understood within the category (6). How does the term transgender in Valentine’s words “restrict possibilities”? (28). American trans activist Virginia Prince, who published Transvestia magazine, is commonly believed to have coined the terms ‘transgenderism’ and ‘transgenderist’ to provide a clear distinction between transgender and transsexual (469; Aaron H Devor 11). In 1969, Prince “designated herself ‘trangenderal’ in order to deflect claims that she was on a path to transsexual” (Robert Hill 376). However, Ariadne Kane also deserves credit for developing the initial meaning of transgender and possibly coining it by identifying as ‘transgenderist’ in 1976 whereas Prince did not use the term ‘transgenderist’ until 1978 (Hill 376). Prince believes that “others soon

13 ‘Transgenderism’ is no longer an appropriate term to describe transgender people as a whole.
took to the term and it is now used, erroneously” which “leaves no simple term for
describing those who have changed gender without a change of sex” (469). Holly Boswell
reaffirms Prince’s perspective by suggesting transgender should be conceived as an
alternative to binary gender (Valentine 32). Valentine states that “the idea of transgender as a
radical alternative or as a ‘third way’ between transsexuality and transvestism...was quickly
overtaken in the early 1990s by a third usage of transgender as a collective” (33). As this
suggests, the term swiftly began to “enable one group – frequently transsexuals – to stand in
for others while giving the impression of collectivity” (Valentine 39). How does the collapse
of transgender and transsexual impact the lives of non-binary transgender subjects who
might be “seduced by the ability to assimilate” (Feinberg)? I employ the distinction between
binary transgender vs. non-binary transgender people in this thesis not as a simple binary-
based division but as a distinction between transpeople who identify within or against the
binary. Stryker states that “grappling with transgender issues requires that some feminists re-
examine, or perhaps examine for the first time” some “exclusionary assumptions” (Stryker 7,
“Introduction” Transgender Studies Reader). The current conflict in ‘transgender’ / trans
studies seems to pinpoint transgender and transsexual subjects against each other, which
creates TG and TS camps for scholars to occupy and defend.

Transgender has become a homogeneous and exclusive term, even though it was
originally intended to be an umbrella in order to recognize the diversity of transpeople. This
has impacted societal understanding of the terms transgender and trans whereby
“homogeneous understandings of trans are often employed within academia as well as
societally” (Sanger 271). Homogeneous in this sense equals a binary-based understanding of
trans subjectivity in line with a singular metanarrative of being transgender. Wilchins states
that “transgender was intended as an umbrella term, then a name of inclusion. But umbrellas
don’t work well when one group holds them up” (GenderQueer 59). This thesis explores an important question regarding exclusion and marginalization instigated by the contest over transgender. “Has transgender, a voice that originated from the margins, begun to produce its own marginalized voices?” (Wilchins GenderQueer 59). Considering that binary transpeople (transmen and transwomen) have come to dominate the mainstream transgender discourse, how are we privileging trans subjects who identify within the binary against those who do not? (Wilchins GenderQueer 61). Monro also reaffirms this exclusionary production of transgender: “transgender and transsexual people who envisage going beyond the gender binary system to allow for longer-term fluidity, third-sex or androgynous identities form a significant minority within the wider trans communities” (Theorizing Transgender Diversity 36).

I am concerned about non-binary transpeople becoming minorities of a minority, pushed to the margins of the trans community, due to the exclusionary production instigated by the term transgender; however, it is also a concern that cisgender as a term seems to create some sort of reductive division between trans and non-transpeople. In particular, any trans person who cannot fit the narrow scope of the Transgender Metanarrative could be labeled as cisgender even though they may not express themselves or identify within the binary at all. This sets up a simplistic division between visible transpeople vs. non-visible transpeople and assumes that one is not trans just based on whether or not they fit the normative script of being trans. I support Enke’s call to action to critically analyze the term cisgender because it could actually be setting up a false dichotomy that further seeks to erode trans diversity. It is rarely productive to call for us against them frameworks and this is what the cisgender vs. transgender division is creating – an us against them mentality.
Transgender is clearly a ‘contested site’ and tensions exist between “transgender and transsexual persons, discourses and practices” (Elliot 2). Viviane Namaste is often cited as a proponent of binary transgender people’s critical needs in terms of health care, legal recognition and societal tolerance. However, Namaste creates a problematic distinction that effectively denigrates non-binary transgender people. Her work creates a false hierarchy between transgender and transsexual people by calling transgender people “the dominant and more privileged group whose theoretical and political perspectives are based on a gay/lesbian queer framework that is anathema to most transsexuals” (Elliot 36). Namaste’s use of privilege in relation to transgender people is problematic considering that being visibly oppositional to the dominant gender order and not being able to pass and live as an identifiable gender is almost an impossible and risky existence. Elliot also corroborates my criticism of Namaste’s work. Elliot states that “what is disconcerting about Namaste’s rhetoric, and what may account in part for its failure to be engaged by others, are the oppositions she establishes between transsexual and transgender queers such that the latter appear as a privileged minority that is unable to think beyond its own boundaries” (Elliot 41). The problem with Namaste’s argument about transgender people compared to transsexuals is that she demands “that we choose between questions of identity and the real life needs of transsexuals,” which “sets up a misleading and unnecessary opposition” (Elliot 30).

In contrast, Bornstein constructs a ‘hierarchy of trans’ with post-operative and pre-operative transsexuals at the top and transgender people below (67), so there are clearly competing perspectives in terms of which ‘side’ is the more privileged.  

14 My intent is not to privilege one side over the other here in some sort of hierarchy, but it is my objective to write about what I believe is a marginalized sub-community (non-binary
research focuses on the fact that gender ambiguity and gender outlaws “are made invisible in this culture” (74). Bornstein suggests that the “bipolar gender system” perpetuates a form of patriarchy that maintains the divide between men and women (107). This bipolar gender system is founded on ideologies that have productively worked to erase non-binary transgender subjects by the adoption of transgender as a homogenous and exclusionary term synonymous with transmen or transwomen (erstwhile called transsexuals). How did this happen? The following section provides a theoretical foundation for the normalization of trans subjectivity in line with the binary, which excludes trans subjects who would challenge gender and force new language and forms of societal recognition to disrupt the status quo of gender, sex and sexuality on a global scale.

people) within the trans community, who have been excluded from the current mainstream discourse about transpeople.
Why are we consumed by an identity politics that constrains our choices into oppositions and categories that in turn alienate and oppress difference? Althusser examines the State’s power in asserting institutionalized values and beliefs in addition to describing these multiple and distinct institutions as ‘ideological state apparatuses’ that work to reinforce power (Althusser 17). The nation-state controls the masses by constraining identity to classify the powerful from the weak in a type of superior/inferior framework. The ‘ruling identity class’ asserts/assigns an intelligible sex/gender at birth as being woman/female/feminine and man/male/masculine. This bipolar sex/gender system operates under the assumption that these are the only two identities available, in Althusser’s words one is an “always-already” subject even before one is born (50). “The School-Family couple has replaced the Church-Family couple” (Althusser 28). I can think of nothing more pervasive in terms of inculcating the normative bipolar sex/gender system than the School-Family educational ideological apparatus. Althusser states that “ideology hails/interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects” (49) and one cannot be a subject without an

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15 It could be contested that I employ a known structuralist Marxist in a section on poststructuralist theory; however, I believe that Althusser’s work on ideology provided the early foundation for poststructuralist deconstruction of identity positions.
identity, so identity is tied into the productive power of ideology. Our identity is born before us. It is crafted in the eternal realm of ideology. Therefore, a trans subject who acts outside of the bipolar gender system assigned at birth is then hailed/interpellated back into a normative regime of sex and gender.

The obsession with identity has been in part created by our need to confess identity as a way of affirming our social existence. Identities seem liberating on the surface, but the need to confess an identity ends up organizing people into constrained categories. The ‘task of telling everything concerned’ with sex (Foucault 23) provides identity politics with a hegemonic power to contain difference. These speech acts focus on rational and organized ways of thinking within the binary, for example homosexual/heterosexual, that has made it almost impossible to exist outside of these oppositions because sex became a public matter in terms of administration, policing and the law (Foucault 24). Foucault’s assertion that homosexual became a ‘species’ (43) confirms that identities were created to govern people in line with taxonomic perspectives that work to organize and catalogue all things. Foucault’s perspective on the scientia sexualis describes how “we tell the truth of sex” (58) and I believe this is related to our gender identity in line with the confession. Foucault states that “one confesses – or is forced to confess,” (59) so identity is connected to the confession in a way that constrains our ways of subjective expression, particularly in relation to trans subjects. This form of identity confession works with ideology and the ideological state apparatus so that “we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us” (Foucault 60). How do we confess ourselves out of the bipolar sex and gender system? Can I find ways to use confession as an “obligatory act of speech” (Foucault 62) against itself? Subjects are obsessed with confessing a stable identity in order to be intelligible and acknowledged human beings, so how have trans subjects held onto the term transgender in
order to be recognized as human? I believe transgender has swept up all trans difference vis-à-vis ideology and the confession to hold captive non-binary transgender subjects. How can poststructuralist feminist theory work as a queer launchpad for thinking about ways to challenge this powerful acquiescence to the homogeneous and hegemonic understanding of transgender? Derrida asks: “how does multiplication get arrested in difference?” (401, 1991). The ‘black holes of knowledge’ in the form of binaries prevents anything from escaping (Wilchins 41) so that a “new nonbinary gender,” to expand on Wilchins statement (41), is impossible to recognize. One of the main objectives of this work is to articulate, both in written and visual form, that non-binary genders and fluid subjects can be imagined and recognized. The act of confession can be used as a deconstructionist methodology to challenge stagnant identity in the first place by confessing identities beyond the binary.

Foucault’s thought on biopower (developed into biopolitics) in the area of the confession and ideological control over bodies is key to my research. It is through both the body’s surface and internal compositions that we consider intelligible (binary) vs. non-intelligible (non-binary) humans. “According to Foucault, ever since modernity the aim of political power has been to control and thus govern the individual as representative of the species” (Braidotti 38 Transpositions). Braidotti raises Nicholas Rose’s theory of disciplining the bodies of population to suggest that “biopolitics has become by now the dominant regime of control of bodies through a system of integrated scientific discourses and social mechanisms” (38 Transpositions). In the same vein, Stryker and Aizura claim that “as trans subjects become ‘countable,’ we also become vulnerable to new modes of biopolitical regulation” (7). The movements of bodies, as Benedict de Spinoza suggests, explain other bodies (viii). How bodies are disciplined and controlled on an ideological level of biopower forms one of the central foundational aspects of the transgender metanarrative.
Spinoza states that “all material things, including living organisms, have a structure, being composed of bodies within bodies up to every higher level of complexity” (xiv). In effect, we all become the same categorized into two ‘known’ bodies in line with the binary. It is this body-within-a-body theory, captured by the power of the narrative that signifies a consumption of mainstream trans discourse by all transpeople.
Image 5.1 REBIRTH © Joshua M. Ferguson 2016.
We exist as embodied human subjects because of our ‘multibodies’ and these multiplicity of bodies inform and control our subjectivities in formation as we become “Chinese boxes of self-monitoring thought” (Spinoza xiv) acting in a similar way to Foucault’s panoptican whereby our ‘multibodies’ surveil from the inside on a psychological and physiological level to inform and constrain.\(^\text{16}\) Susan Bordo states that “where power works ‘from below’ prevailing forms of selfhood and subjectivity (gender among them) are maintained, not chiefly through physical restraint and coercion (although social relations may certainly contain such elements), but through individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms” (27). How has this form of biopower through a multi-body theory of self-surveillance from the inside affected our ability as transpeople to exist as who we are, particularly some of us who exist outside of the binary? Spinoza suggests that “to be able not to exist is to lack power, and conversely, to be able to exist is to have power” (7). The power that intelligible subjects receive from existing within recognizable terms as a binary subjectivity prevents those of us without power from accessing new narratives of being beyond the binary. Butler states that “the mobilization of identity categories for the purposes of politicization always remain threatened by the prospect of identity becoming an instrument of the power one opposes” (xxviii Gender Trouble). “The individuals composing the human body, and consequently the human body itself, are affected by external bodies in very many ways” (Spinoza 44). This area of biopolitics operates within and without the body to inform and constrain gendered possibilities as Spinoza suggests “the human body, to be preserved, requires a great many other bodies, by which it is, as it were, continually

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\(^{16}\) The panopticon is an institutional building type designed in the 18\(^{\text{th}}\) century that emphasizes self-surveillance in a prison setting with a single guard at the centre. The inmates of the prison cannot tell if they are being observed so they must control their behaviour in an act of self-surveillance.
regenerated” (44). Of course, one can read this in both literal and figurative terms to understand that our bodies are made up of infinite bodies (Spinoza 43), but yet they are also informed by other bodies that are both external but akin to our own in a way that educates us and informs us of the possible options to become human within recognizable terms.

A Derridean Interlude: Transgender (Re)Awakening in the Border Lines

I do not want to pass as a man or woman in order to shackle my prismatic and fluid gender. I do not want to get swept up in the ideology of passing “brought on by socio-medical discourse” (Feinberg 89). I do not want to be squeezed into a category constructed around sex and gender ideologies in order to appease a hegemonic and homogeneous societal understanding of woman/female man/male. I do not want to destroy my unintelligible gender as a way of surviving. I do want to expand a societal understanding of non-binary genders that deserve to be recognized and acknowledged because the material concerns that impact our lives are incommensurable. It is impossible for me to exist with a sex and gender identity outside of the hegemonic order of man/male and woman/female. I cannot possibly choose between a male and female gender in my forms of identification. It hurts to identify as a woman or man in my identification when I know that these identities do not belong to me. I belong somewhere else. I belong on the borderlines -- on the unspeakable liminal space shrouded and suffocated by the binary’s ideological power. I am transgender and I am neither woman nor man. I deserve to be recognized by society and this recognition

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17 I want to point out here again to be clear that my theory is not meant to challenge binary transpeople who need this socio-medical model to transition their sex and pass in order to bring their body in line with their gender identity. Rather, my work here is meant to open a discursive space of understanding for non-binary genders in order to expand this discussion and move toward theory that can work to inspire political and material change for transgender people like me.
will force political, material and theoretical changes that move some stagnant feminist theory into a new wave that recognizes genders beyond the binary.
Image 5.2 REBIRTH © Joshua M. Ferguson 2016.
Jacques Derrida’s post-structuralist theory in relation to feminist theory will begin to deconstruct this oppressive theoretical space for non-binary transgender subjects. Writing is always limited in some sense (Derrida *Writing and Difference* 9) and so there are aspects of this dissertation that will work discursively to ignore typical structures and coherent thinking, particularly in Chapter Six. Derrida writes about the “dream of emancipation” from the constraint embedded in language and that “writing is first and always something over which one bends” (*Writing and Difference* 28-29). Therefore, in order to avoid bending to writing’s will controlled by the dominant ideological force around and apropos sex and gender, I will at times avoid a traditional way of theorizing, focused on rationality. In the autoethnography of disidentification (Chapter Six), I enact this break from traditional academic writing through the use of hybrid poems, essays, and stories, in the hope that this will aid in a deconstruction of the hegemony of gender, sex, and sexuality. I find that my writing is always constrained by a critical mind that often does not allow the writing as an artistic form to write freely as a form of engaging with the magic of thought. What if I completely let go of structure, grammar, punctuation and write freely beyond the categories of thought controlling most of this dissertation (except in parts of Chapter Six) in the act of writing? How would this enable an opportunity in writing to achieve deconstruction in relation to the hegemony of sex, gender and gender?

One must always adapt difference to fit it within the existing identity categories. Derrida did not write in English, so he did not use ‘gender’ in his work, especially related to the French word ‘genre’ (Kamuf 82). Derrida’s work on sexuality implied an emphasis on “dispersion and multiplication” without the “dialectic of a duality” (Derrida *Geschlecht* 379). He asks: “if one insisted on consigning difference within dual opposition, how does multiplication get arrested in difference?” (*Geschlecht* 401). The arrest of multiplication in
difference, illustrated perfectly in the attempt to homogenize all trans subjects under the umbrella term transgender, has an ontological basis in ideologies and confessional practices that have been constructed to categorize us into coherent and controlled queer subjects. For example, I will explore how traditional gay and lesbian identity politics have marginalized other queer identities, particularly non-binary transgender people in terms of sweeping up this queer-gendered difference into the binary oppositions that have become societally accepted queer categories. Thus, I work to ‘decompose’ binary oppositions and the “inscription, stamp and imprint” (Derrida Geschlecht 400-401) modality of identities in order to arrive at a theoretical place for moving the discussion forward towards multiplication and freedom. Deconstruction in the realm of feminist and queer theory enables this movement forward.

The “demand for a narrative – an order, a petition” (Derrida Living On: Border Lines 260) bears striking similarities to the order of identities. One must “tell us who you are” (Derrida Living On: Border Lines 261) in every instance to maintain the order of identity. Ideologies that enforce identities are instruments of “torture working to wring the narrative out of one as if it were a terrible secret” (Living On: Border Lines 261). Derrida states that “there is no speech act not already the iteration of another, no circle and no quotation marks to reassure us about the identity, opposition, or distinction of speech events” (Living On: Border Lines 263). We write, issue and assume our identities, particularly a transgender identity, in the order that is enforced upon us not in a way that is our own or that is unknown. “One never writes either in one’s own language or in a foreign language” (Derrida Living On: Border Lines 268). The convergence of feminist theory and queer theory, explored in Chapter Four, (re)awakens modes of writing about non-binary trans subjects that we can call trans theory. Queer theory was inspired by feminist theory and focused largely
on sexuality; however, queer theory has incredible potential for gender studies, particularly in the articulation of non-binary transgender subjects that embody fluid and hybrid genders. I will return to this in Chapters Five and Six of this dissertation to call for the articulation of hybrid non-binary genders. How does the Transgender Metanarrative limit and restrict possible third and hybrid spaces of identification for transpeople? This next section will begin to lay the foundation for my theory regarding the existence of the Transgender Metanarrative.

The Crystalized Transgender Metanarrative: Embodied Stories, Captive Trans Narratives & Seduced Actors

“New imperatives and opportunities for ‘transgender normativity’ have taken shape that secure citizenship for some trans bodies at the expense of others.” – Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura

“We most need to ‘bloom’ rather than ‘transcend.’” – Susan Bordo

This section begins to explore in depth the dominance of a master narrative of transgender or what Donna Haraway calls ‘the informatics of domination’ (Braidotti Transpositions 4). First, I want to explore the theme of narrative in relation to gender and transpeople with the prolific work of Judith Butler. Butler’s theory of gender performativity in Gender Trouble initiates a discussion about gender and the body as “unreal and unintelligible” (xxv). “To what extent does the body come into being in and through the mark(s) of gender?” (12). Butler’s question provides an insightful focus to understand how gender is realized in and through the body. In Undoing Gender, Butler states that “recognition becomes a site of power whereby the human is differentially produced” (2). How does a transperson achieve recognition and intelligibility if the body cannot come into being without any intelligible markers of gender identity considering that language in
relation to gender is predicated on the binary? Butler states that “the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable” (*Undoing Gender* 4). And, if self-determination exists, how do people outside of the sex and gender binary self-identify and determine an identity outside of intelligibility? Butler’s *Giving an Account of Oneself* clarifies her preoccupation with stories. She states that “the problem is not with universality as such but with an operation of universality that fails to be responsive to cultural particularity and fails to undergo a reformulation of itself in response to the social and cultural conditions it includes within its scope of applicability” (*Giving An Account* 6). Butler’s later works understand the importance of cultural variation as opposed to her earlier theory in *Gender Trouble* that underestimates culture as a fluid force rather than a static one (*Gender Trouble* 11). She goes on to state that the “‘I’ has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms” (*Giving An Account* 8). Where do these norms originate? They do not originate in an intrinsic sense, but outside of ourselves as Butler states: “the very terms by which we give account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making. They are social in character, and they establish social norms, a domain of unfreedom and substitutability within which our ‘singular’ stories are told” (*Giving An Account* 21). Butler draws on Mari Matsuda’s formulation to suggest that “speech does not merely reflect a relation of social domination; speech enacts domination, becoming the vehicle through which that social structure is reinstated” (*Excitable Speech* 18). Consequently, are stories only made possible after an account has been situated within the realm of intelligibility? Is an individual’s ability to ‘perform’ gender voluntarily dependent on being freed from the grand narrative vis-à-vis the confessional hail to being? In other words, does the non-voluntary aspect of performativity *need* the confessional hailing of identity set in place by grand narratives?
Image 5.3 REBIRTH © Joshua M. Ferguson 2016.
In *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, Butler asserts a notion of acting in relation to gender (*Giving An Account* 392). Butler states that “because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis” (*Giving An Account* 394). In addition, “language sustains the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a literal way; rather, it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible” (*Butler Excitable Speech* 5). The transgender metanarrative, particularly the illusion that all transpeopple are only transmen and transwomen, exists as a form of repeated script in line with appeasing the binary. Butler employs Foucault to suggest that “the subject that is freed is even more deeply shackled than originally thought” (*Giving An Account* 400). Wittig reaffirms this notion as she suggests that the trope “out of the closet” “produces the expectation of a fresh air and a light of illumination that never arrives,” because “being ‘out’ always depends to some extent on being ‘in’; it gains its meaning only within that polarity” (309).

Transpeople are varied, but the Transgender Metanarrative in mainstream discourse colonizes queer gender identity into the realm of intelligibility by shackling transpeople into the man/woman binary. This takes place on the level of ideological acquiescence whereby transpeople are hailed into being with only two options available considering the strength of the ‘trans-becoming’ metanarrative. This colonizing transgender discourse operates under the guise of identity-based freedom similar to the gay and lesbian identity politics movement in order to claim equal rights. One must be intelligible in order to appeal to the masses so “becoming minoritarian marks a shift from the dominant subject position, but nevertheless remains tied to it” (*Braidotti Transpositions* 133). Butler’s work signals an ontological basis
for trans identity partly hidden in the methodological realm of attaining narrative and stories in studies. Transgender narratives, some developed and propagated in trans studies or in popular culture, depend upon a notion of performativity and the enactment, or ‘acting,’ out oneself in relation to others. Consider the metaphor of Medusa’s cementing gaze to describe some trans experience vis-à-vis the metanarrative or what I call the solidification of gender identity in line with the binary (especially for some transpeople who attempt to identify outside of it) (Gender Trouble 140). How does this impact transpeople who disidentify with being a transman or transwoman? And, how does this unifying and colonizing discourse shackle non-binary transpeople from being able to articulate their various gender identities that are a direct challenge to the binary? Butler argues that “gender is not a fact” and I want to extend this understanding to trans identities because the various acts of transgender create the idea of transgender and without those acts, there would be no transgender at all in the way that most people understand it (Butler Gender Trouble 190). Therefore, using one of Butler’s most famous formulations about gender, I would shift this to say that transgender is “a construction that regularly conceals its genesis, the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions” (Butler Gender Trouble 190). In other words, the construction of the Transgender Metanarrative can be understood to take place with ideological and biopolitical power in an effort to conceal its ontology, which makes it difficult to challenge and question.

The previous and subsequent chapters give many examples of the instantiation of what are framed as and understood to be ‘acts of transgender,’ and it is through the accretion of such acts that the Transgender Metanarrative comes into being. To the extent that the ‘transgender’ that thereby comes into being is restrictive, exclusionary, and relies on a binary
understanding of gender that serves existing power structures, its ontology is concealed. In the performative parts of this dissertation I enact a different transgender narrative, one intended to disrupt that master narrative of transgender and its biopolitics of exclusion with the theoretical promise of disidentification.
In his work on disidentification José Estaban Muñoz pushes Butler’s theory in a useful direction for my purposes. Disidentification is “meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices” (Disidentifications 4). Muñoz envisions ways for disidentification to happen, which begins with “internal narratives of subject formation” (Disidentifications 4). The ontological difference between internal and external narratives is a crucial aspect of understanding how narratives take hold of the subject. Is his theory of disidentification a voluntary action or does one enact it in relation to Butler’s theory of performativity? In other words, can we consciously perform disidentification, or are the forms and meanings of our actions already determined? How does his idea of the ‘technology of the self’ as fiction fuel methods of representing transpeople (Disidentifications 20)? How do people disidentify with narratives of subjectivity in order to break free from the fictive and oppressive qualities of identity categories?

Holly Boswell and Virginia Prince’s contributions to trans studies evoke similar questions about narratives. I explored earlier the competing claims around Prince’s coinage of the terms ‘transgenderism’ and ‘transgenderist’ to make a clear distinction between transgender and transsexual. Whether or not Prince coined the terms to describe people like her “who have breasts and live full time as a woman, but who have no intention of having genital surgery” (469), her focus was to clarify the problems that arise when the distinction between sex and gender are eroded (471). She also discusses “teachers of gender” like parents, teachers, peers and coaches (470). How do these “teachers of gender” participate in the narrative of gender that enacts trans identity? My next chapter will elaborate on this binary gender-based ideology that has an ontology in the area of education and family, which is evident in binary trans films.
Boswell corroborates Prince’s perspective to separate transgender people from transsexuals (53). “Is transgender simply a result of being more honest with oneself and resistant to socialization” (54)? I think that this is an important question to consider on the level of theory. Keep in mind here that Boswell uses transgender to mean people who do not transition from one to the other in contrast to transsexual. Talking about the way transgender is currently understood (that is, primarily as what used to be called transsexual), Stryker and Aizura suggest that transgender’s intelligibility “risks a kind of theoretical imperialism that masks and marginalizes a more heterogeneous class of phenomena that can never be encompassed adequately within transgender’s conceptual framework” (8). How does socialization influence the subjectivity of a transperson when it operates on a powerful level of coercion and seduction vis-à-vis the transgender metanarrative?18 Monique Wittig states that the “Other (a category of others) has substituted itself for the One, keeping under it huge groups of oppressed peoples that would in turn become the Other of the ex-others, become by then the One” (53). So, the other is colonized in an effort to extend that colonization beyond its reach to other others that are similar in order to bring all into the one (the transgender metanarrative) to become one and intelligible. Boswell borrows from Leslie Feinberg to raise the question of seduction in relation to gendered embodiment, specifically trans embodiment that bears similarities to the theme of narrative (55). It is seductive to relate one’s embodiment to a coherent and socially accepted narrative. Boswell states that “only within the last few decades have transgendered people become so seduced by the ability to assimilate, made possible by recent hormonal and surgical advances” (55). Lucas

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18 I want to make another point here to say that my theory does not call into question those transpeople who identify within the binary, but theory needs to allow for room to call into question just how powerful the normative transgender discourse has become, particularly through forms of popular culture.
Crawford reaffirms this point by exploring the work of Jay Prosser in *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transexuality*. Crawford notes that “feelings associated with inhabiting the ‘wrong body’ are the ones that have, in the manner Cvetkovich describes, formed the most accessible public narrative of transsexuality” (131), which I believe can be extended to the term transgender now. Crawford goes on to state a hope for a wider set of narrative possibilities: “transgender and transsexual subjects clearly do and will continue to exist, and for good reason – but hopefully as a way to deterritorialize gender rather than settle it, to take apart their own habits and territories, to help us experiment rather than solve a problem, and to take us wayward rather than directly from one point to the next” (139).

Butler states “the more one seeks oneself in language, the more one loses oneself precisely there where one is sought” (*Excitable Speech* 30). Some transpeople are born with a gender identity that does not fit with their sexed body and they deserve the right and access to live and be accepted as this binary trans identity. However, gender is not static for all transpeople, even though for some, the immutability of gender is so important. The Transgender Metanarrative has disseminated a powerful discourse about gender’s static quality, particularly that gender cannot change: one is born with an innate gender identity. The “born-that-way” discourse is similar to a successful strategy in gay and lesbian identity politics, claiming that one is born with a sexuality that cannot change or be challenged, and so people should just accept non-normative sexualities for what they are. While acknowledging the important political advances made thanks to this “born-that-way” discourse, I would like to challenge the increasing hegemony of this perspective by asserting that some non-binary transpeople’s (including myself) genders do change over our lifetimes and not just in a linear, one-time-only direction from one thing to another. The change(s) directly challenge a beginning-middle-end linear progression in line with binary subjectivity.
Holly Boswell raises the notion of a bridge of understanding that transpeople can deploy to help others learn of gender identity and gender expression. However, I would argue that this sort of explanatory ‘bridge’ is often used to perpetuate homogeneous notions of transgender and to contribute to the dominant narrative that constructs an understanding of how trans identity should be adopted. Rather than creating a bridge, I am interested in examining how transpeople may become a “cultural contribution” (Whittle 196) in diverse ways. Stephen Whittle states that “‘I’ become a part of the object of my study as I produce. In studying I politicize and theorize the culture of gender and irreversibly change it” (196). Therefore, trans studies centers on an ability to incorporate the self into the study as a way of “talking about yourself” (197). Whittle’s work is focused on genderfuck (one who bends, fucks with gender norms, similar to genderqueer but with performative characteristics), but his method of involving the self connects with Butler’s markers of gender in enabling a deconstruction of the status quo, particularly the Transgender Metanarrative vis-à-vis telling the trans story.

As opposed to this deconstructive self-incorporating narrative, the “sensationalized autobiography” most often employed in trans studies cements transgender in our discourse and continues to hold many diverse subjects “captive” (Heyes Feminist Solidarity 1100). Gender is a genre (Heyes Feminist Solidarity 1108; Stone 165; Milliken 54), a set of tropes embedded in a narrative of constraint that works on a performative level. Sandy Stone discusses storytelling and the “autobiographical imperative” of transpeople (161). They

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19 Cressida J. Heyes maintains a critical distinction between trans (a “broad umbrella adjective intended to capture the multiple forms of sex and gender crossing and mixing”), transgender: (“anyone who lives a gender they were not perinatal assigned or that is not publicly recognizable within Western cultures’ binary gender systems,”) and transsexual: (“anyone who undergoes (or hopes to undergo) any of a number of physical interventions to bring his sexed body more closely into line with his gender identity”) (Feminist Solidarity 1094).
emphasize the way trans autobiographies are reduced to a single type of narrative: “Heteroglossic accounts of difference and emergent polyvocalities are constrained and homogenized to satisfy categories and medical discourse” (Stone 163). Stone states that “bodies are screens on which we see projected the momentary settlements that emerge from ongoing struggles over beliefs and practices within the academic and medical communities” (163). Therefore, gender is understood in our culture as an enactment vis-à-vis narratives, performativity, texts and screens that all work to feedback understanding and knowledge in the cultural loop that constrains gender, especially in relation to transpeople. Braidotti suggests that the “faculty of imagination plays a role also in making it possible for the subject to discern and gain access to the contingent realities of social existence and how the ordinary experience is constructed (Giving Account of Oneself 163). The ability for one to express oneself through the ‘I’ in language, in connection with an identity, is possible only for those for whom their ‘personhood’ is expressible in language (Butler Gender Trouble xxvi). In other words, the power of the Transgender Metanarrative relies on the limits of language, which is restricted in terms of the kinds of personhood it can express—female/woman and man/male, she and he. Thus power is deployed not in a conscious way but one that nonetheless exerts a form of biopolitical and ideological control: one who wishes to express themself is required, through narrative-based confession, to ascribe to an already-intelligible identity. Furthermore, interpellation as a binary transgender subject is inaugurative to use Butler’s term. “It seeks to introduce a reality rather than report on an existing one; it accomplishes this introduction through a citation of existing convention…its purpose is to indicate and establish a subject in subjection…its reiterative operation has the effect of sedimenting its ‘positionality’ over time” (Excitable Speech 34).
We are not always aware of our identity formation in this case. Our identities can exist prior to us in existence and we do not exist without identities, as they are performative. Identities perform to erase a ‘being’ behind the doing of identity as “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler Gender Trouble 34). How can one imagine diverse forms of trans subjectivity if there are only two possible identities that exist in mainstream discourse? Do we exhibit control over our gender identities beyond the binary? What new understandings might emerge from putting pressure on the normative term transgender (Stryker and Aizura 9)? Cinema is arguably the most powerful form of popular culture and it is this artform that has disseminated both homogenous and disruptive images of transpeople over the last fifty or so years both in American cinema and beyond. I will now engage with the Transgender Metanarrative that I have worked to theorize in this section to observe it as a fact in the next chapter of my dissertation. In particular, I will explore the transgender metanarrative’s deployment through fiction and non-fiction film that work to represent binary trans subjects in Chapter Four and non-binary trans subjects in Chapter Five.
Chapter Four

The Proliferation of Binary Transgender Cinematic Texts: Transgender Metanarrative via a Transgender Ideological Cinematic Apparatus

Introduction: A Film Studies Theoretical Foundation

My undergraduate thesis completed at the University of Western Ontario (now Western University) argued for a gendered ideological cinematic apparatus at work in transnational cinema that seeks to cement normative ideologies of gender in line with the binary. I want to expand on this earlier theory to introduce my observation of the Transgender Metanarrative at work in mainstream North American trans fiction and non-fiction (documentary) cinema. My idea of the transgender ideological cinematic apparatus is founded in the theory articulated in Chapter Three of this dissertation, particularly how identity politics, biopower, the confession and narrative all work in synergy to constrain trans subjectivity within the binary. This introductory section will examine film theory that has both been applied to trans films by other scholars and theory that can be applied to my fiction and non-fiction film analysis in the body of this chapter. I will then briefly discuss the current debate initiated by mostly binary transpeople about who they assume are cisgender actors playing transgender roles in fiction film. This debate recalls my earlier discussion of the problematic division between cisgender and transgender as a reductive delineation that is based on exclusions and assumptions about who is trans and who is not.

I shall begin by expanding on the theory of a transgender ideological cinematic apparatus at work in cinema that aims to articulate the transgender metanarrative. This theory is founded on Althusser’s concept of ideology indicated in Chapter Three and Teresa De Lauretis theory of the technologies of gender in her book of the same name *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*. De Lauretis’ notion here springboards from
Foucault’s theory of sexuality as a ‘technology of sex’ and she proposes that “gender, too, both as representation and as self-representation, is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema” (2). She proposes that gender is a representation and that this representation of gender is its construction (3). This “construction of gender is also effected by its deconstruction,” (De Lauretis 3) which is at the center of my film analysis both in this chapter and in Chapter Four. To summarize, “the construction of gender is the product and the process of both representation and self-representation” (De Lauretis 9). Therefore, the representation and self-representation of transpeople in both fiction and non-fiction film respectively rely on what is feeding the representation and the representation’s impact on the audience. The feedback loop created between the ideologies at work in constructing the representational image and the results of this image work synergistically to cement the transgender metanarrative. This is a “doubled vision” that De Lauretis postulates as one can be both inside and outside the ideology of gender (or transgender in our case) (10).

Althusser’s concept of interpellation is expanded by De Lauretis as she states that it is “the process whereby a social representation is accepted and absorbed by an individual as her (or his) own representation, and so becomes, for that individual, real, even though it is in fact imaginary” (12). Of course, De Lauretis operates under a binarism-based linguistic framework here by suggesting that one can only be her/his. That aside, her expanded theory of interpellation enriches an understanding of the Transgender Metanarrative whereby the imaginary (the image on the screen or screens) becomes the real – it becomes one’s own representation. How does the film image work on-screen to assimilate subjects into the transgender metanarrative?

I will now draw upon Richard Dyer’s theory of cinematic stereotypes and Jack Halberstam’s work on female masculinity in cinema to add onto this theory of the
transgender ideological cinematic apparatus (a technology of gender) in enacting the transgender metanarrative.\textsuperscript{20} Dyer’s work on stereotypes strikes a parallel with the Transgender Metanarrative because there are solidified stereotypes of binary trans representation in both the fiction and non-fiction films of this chapter. The solidification of a stereotype occurs at the level of ordering process (generalities, patterns and types), by way of a short cut in referring to the world and to express values and beliefs (Dyer 12-14). Dyer states that the “effectiveness of stereotypes resides in the way they invoke a consensus. Stereotypes proclaim” (14) so how can this consensus-based proclamation work in cinema to further the transgender metanarrative? We achieve our ideas of social groups due to stereotypes (Dyer 14), which means that stereotypes of transpeople are a powerful component of the feedback loop that both creates the representation and its results. A stereotype requires sharp boundary definitions “to define clearly where the pale ends and thus who is clearly within and who is clearly beyond it” (16). Therefore, the stereotype is a key theory in analyzing cinema to provide evidence for the transgender metanarrative. In Female Masculinity, Halberstam raises Dyer’s work on stereotypes to suggest that they are neither negative nor positive. It would be reductive and simplistic to consider a binary-based understanding of stereotypes as bad or good. One must analyze and examine the stereotypes at work to determine any value judgement. Halberstam states that stereotypes “represent a particularly economic way of identifying members of a particular social group in relation to a set of quickly recognizable characteristics” (Female Masculinity 180). However, this is the possible problematic component of stereotypes because their reliance on essentialist

\textsuperscript{20} To clarify, Jack Halberstam is also known as Judith Halberstam, but prefers the first name Jack now instead of Judith. I will also use Halberstam’s name instead of pronouns throughout this dissertation as I could not determine which pronoun Halberstam prefers at this time.
characteristics seems similar to the Transgender Metanarrative considering that it is the thematic repetitive characteristics at work that deploy this narrative’s power in excluding non-binary trans subjects from mainstream discourse. Halberstam employs stereotypes to analyze variations of butch representation (the genealogy of the butch) in cinema (*Female Masculinity* 186). Halberstam develops six categories of butch: tomboys, predators, fantasy butches, transvestite butches, barely butches and postmodern butches (*Female Masculinity* 188-221). Ultimately, Halberstam’s list of stereotypes reads more like genres of representation of female masculinity in film similar to the genres outlined by John Phillips in *Transgender on Screen*; however, are categories in line with stereotypes productive in order to examine patterns? How would categorizing stereotypical binary transgender representation assist in ameliorating the Transgender Metanarrative at work in the films in this chapter? I will turn to discussing trans representation in Hollywood and then move to analyzing a list of mostly contemporary binary transgender films and identify four main thematic motifs in the following sections.

**The Transgender Metanarrative Represented in North American Fiction Film: Cis/Trans Casting Debates**

My earlier discussion of the reductive delineation between transgender and cisgender people relates to a pressing discussion in the film industry about who should be playing trans roles in film. I argue that the binary between cisgender and transgender is problematic because it reduces people to either/or while simultaneously assuming that people who seem to be visibly cisgender and/or have not claimed a trans identity are not trans. This is a problem because identities should not be enforced on people unless they assume them in the first place. For example, a person is not transgender unless they identify as such; therefore, one cannot be cisgender unless they identify within the binary in terms of sex and gender
(gender identity and gender expression). Why would one assume a cisgender identity and not a trans one? Cisgender seems to operate outside of this identity framework whereby mostly transpeople use it as a way of dividing non-transpeople from the community. I believe this is problematic because what if a person is not trans or does not identify as trans one day but then does so later on? Or what if a person does not identify as trans, but presents a non-normative (non-binary) gender expression? How is it fair to have the empowering choice of self-identification for trans identities but then use cisgender as an assumptive category that reduces an essentialist of understanding of trans into a separate category from transgender?

These questions are at the heart of the ongoing debate in the film industry and beyond about who should be playing trans roles in film, which relates to representational politics at heart in the film analysis. The proliferation of trans cinema, particularly some of the mainstream titles analyzed in this work, especially *The Danish Girl* (Tom Hooper 2015) and *Dallas Buyer’s Club* (Jean Marc Valléé 2013), has incited what I believe to be an essentialist rendering of transgender vs. cisgender bodies in cinema. This discussion about whether or not ‘cisgender’ people should play trans roles highlights the transgender metanarrative’s exclusionary production because the discourse of cisgender vs. transgender depends upon a reductive understanding of trans subjectivity.

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21 Amazon’s *Transparent* has also raised the profile of this debate as non-trans Jeffrey Tambor plays a transwoman in this show and many critics have argued that this is problematic. Tambor’s performance has received critical acclaim worldwide and the show has been groundbreaking in terms of representing transpeople played by trans actors in addition to employing several trans writers.
Dallas Buyer’s Club’s release in large part initiated the discussion about a ‘cisgender’ actor, Jared Leto, playing the trans character in the film. I will focus on the specifics of the character Leto plays in the film later on in this chapter on the level of analysis, but I want to first indicate the problematic assumptive quality of this debate. Jared Leto is arguably read as gender-fluid. He has long hair and often wears make-up. His gender expression can be read as existing on multiple points on the gender expression continuum. He exhibits a gender expression that is not exactly aligned with his AMAB-sexed body and so we can read this as disrupting the normative definition of trans, which means a subject that does not match up according to normative expectations about sex and gender, particularly that one is AMAB-body, identifies as a man and expresses a masculine gender presentation. However, trans and feminist critics suggest that Jared Leto is a cisgender man playing a transwoman in this film and that this casting choice is problematic because transwomen should play transwomen roles in film. Critics also equate ‘cisgender’ actors playing trans roles with blackface, which leads to an interesting discussion about the social construction of both gender and race and how they are both somewhat performative rather than essentialist. So, the question remains: should trans roles always be played by trans actors?\[22\

In a roundtable discussion initiated by Cosmopolitan magazine’s Michelle Ruiz, trans actors and Hollywood insiders discuss trans casting. Ruiz states that “debate rages over the casting of cisgender actors in high-profile trans roles” (“Trans Actors and Hollywood Insiders”). Zachary Drucker (a trans co-producer and script consultant on Transparent) notes

\[22\] There is parallel furor over Caucasian actors being cast into Asian roles. The debate around Caucasian actors being cast in Gods of Egypt (Alex Proyas 2016) and the Caucasian actor Emma Stone cast as an Asian character in Aloha (Cameron Crowe 2015) amongst others.
that another problematic trend in addition to trans roles being played by ‘cisgender’ actors is that trans roles are being written by cis people (“Trans Actors and Hollywood Insiders”). But, how can one assume that these writers and actors are actually cisgender? Did they identify as cisgender? Have they been asked if they are trans? When does it become a problem that we enforce identification on someone when one has not actually identified themself to be trans or cis in the first place? The two recent high-profile examples of presumably cisgender actors being cast in trans roles are Eddie Redmayne in The Danish Girl and Elle Fanning in About Ray (Gaby Dellal 2015). Trace Lysette (trans actor in Transparent and Starz’ Blunt Talk) believes that if a show is telling trans stories, making money off of these narratives and winning awards, then “it’s only fair that you’re incorporating us not only in front of the camera, but also behind” (Ruiz). Paul Hilepo (Laverne Cox’s agent) supports giving “the trans roles to the trans actors” and equates casting presumably cis actors in trans roles to “casting an Indian actress to play a Middle Eastern role or a Hispanic actor to play an Italian role” (Ruiz). Alex Newell (an actor who played a trans character on the hit-show Glee) presents a different story. Newell believes that it is about who can convey the role the best not just who exactly identifies with the role – a trans actor playing a trans role (Ruiz).\(^\text{23}\) Newell does not identify as transgender, but as gender-fluid, so Newell suggests that they did not receive much of a backlash because “people were so confused by who I am and whether I’m trans or not” (Ruiz). Alexandra Billings (trans actor on Transparent) makes a critical point in that critics of cis actors receiving trans roles are angry before even seeing the film (Ruiz). Billings also notes that a film needs to cast actors who are bankable from a business perspective and although

\(^{23}\) Thanks to Dr. Nora Angeles for pointing out that one could argue therefore that the very ability and competence of non-trans actors to play trans roles convincingly on screen lend further credence and evidence to the instability, performativity and fluidity of gender.
transmen and transwomen actors exist to play these roles, they cannot bankroll these films (Ruiz). Rhys Ernst (Drucker’s ex-partner and also a co-producer and script consultant on Transparent) states that

“the trans movement won’t have achieved its goals if all trans roles are played by trans actors. It can be limiting. A lot of trans roles are written as transitions from one gender or another. Those roles are actually quite hard to cast with trans actors. If it’s a transitioning male-to-female character that’s presenting male for quite a long period of screen time, it would feel a little awkward to me to put a transitioned trans woman in man-drag for the sake of that role (Ruiz).”

Redmayne’s casting as Lili Elbe (transgender pioneer of the 1920s and the first person to undergo gender confirmation surgery) in The Danish Girl has received extensive backlash. However, much of the criticism is ignorant of the business realities of the film industry. For example, Billings was cast in Transamerica (Duncan Tucker 2006) for twenty-four hours, but the director called her to say that he could not get the film made with her cast as the lead character (Ruiz n.p.). The only way he could get the film made was to cast Felicity Huffman in the role instead of Billings (Ruiz n.p.). Billings was upset by the decision, but understands the reality of the situation for trans actors as bankability is one of the key factors in casting cinema around the world even for independent cinema. Redmayne’s casting as Elbe underscores this aspect of the issue, but it is the assumptive aspect of this issue that also needs to be analyzed. The Director of The Danish Girl, Tom Hooper, responded to the backlash the film was receiving due to casting a ‘cis’ man in the role of a transwoman. Hooper responded about Redmayne’s casting by stating that “there’s a certain gender fluidity that I sensed in him, that I found intriguing and it led me to think he might be a really interesting person to cast in this role” (“Eddie Redmayne was cast” n.p.). Hooper
elaborates and suggests that there is something “in him that was drawn to the feminine” (“Eddie Redmayne was cast” n.p.). So, if Redmayne could be read as gender-fluid, then why is it a problem that he is cast into a role that requires this type of gender-fluidity? If Rhys Ernst’s perspective about the problems of a trans actor who has fully transitioned to play a trans role is apt then why can’t actors like Redmayne and Leto who can be read as gender-fluid play trans roles? There is both a problem with assuming that people are cisgender and that one has to be either cisgender or transgender not just when it comes to casting trans roles, but also in general as this distinction has strengthened an ‘us versus other’ dynamic that I examined earlier.

In contrast, a groundbreaking trans film entitled Tangerine was released in late 2015 and has received critical and audience acclaim for its casting of trans actors into trans roles, particularly since both lead characters Alexandra (Mya Taylor) and Sin-Dee (Kitana Kiki Rodriguez) are transgender identified. The film has even garnered Oscar buzz for Mya Taylor’s performance of Alexandra (Nigel M. Smith). Taylor would have made history as the first trans actor to be nominated for an Academy Award. Although this did not happen, the buzz about the possibility of Mya’s nomination was unprecedented for a trans actor. There is a problem with assuming that people are cisgender based on their gender identity alone. And, it is also a problem to assume that a person has to be either cisgender or transgender. The positive response to Tangerine is clear evidence of the appreciation of trans actors cast in trans roles by critics and audiences alike; however, this film was made on an independent scale with a budget of around one hundred thousand dollars, so bankability and the commercial aspect of casting was not as significant an issue for these filmmakers.
compared to the larger studio films discussed. This film does break from the conventional casting of non-trans (assuming they are actually non-trans identified people) into trans roles in Hollywood cinema and it is a cinematic choice that does achieve a higher level of verisimilitude and authenticity compared to the binary trans films studied in this section that do not cast trans-identified actors.

\[24\] \textit{Tangerine}’s box office total is $700,365.00 as of October 11, 2015 according to IMDB.com.
The ‘Double Vision’ of Binary Transgender Cinema: A Transgender Gaze

Told by Written Body Maps in Linear Transit

This section of my dissertation will examine several binary transgender films that work in different ways to represent the Transgender Metanarrative in line with a transgender ideological cinematic apparatus that constrains diverse trans subjectivity within the binary. Binary transgender stories are as relevant as non-binary stories, but it is interesting to note that the majority of critically acclaimed and high-profile trans cinematic texts are focused on reiterating thematic motifs related to theory of the Transgender Metanarrative that I have mapped out in the earlier stages of my thesis. I will analyze: *Transamerica, Boy Meets Girl, Dallas Buyer’s Club, Boys Don’t Cry, Laurence Anyways, Tangerine,* and *The Danish Girl.*

First, it is important to situate some of the recent academic work on trans representation in mainstream cinema. There is a definite lack of comprehensive academic work, particularly in the form of a book or anthology, which deals with trans representation in cinema. It is troubling that such a complex and important representative realm of film studies is being overlooked, especially in terms of how these cinematic texts are feeding into the phenomenon of trans culture and subjectivity worldwide. This chapter of my dissertation in addition to Chapter Five focuses on the profound relevance between pop culture in the form of cinema and the cultural and societal impact that these representations have on trans and non-transpeople. John Phillips’ book *Transgender on Screen* (2006), is the only comprehensive text that exists in terms of trans representation in cinema. One objective of this dissertation is to fill this gap in the literature. There have been many articles written by prolific film studies and gender studies scholars on one or two trans films, but Phillips’ text is the only one that delves deeper into multiple trans texts and attempts to map out themes in trans cinema. However, there are significant problems with Phillips’ text that I want to make
clear prior to employing some of his theory and research in my own analysis of the films above.

Phillips studies the complex phenomenon of transgender representation in popular culture (film and internet) to “demonstrate that perceptions of transgender are mediated by culturally constructed images” (1). The first problem with Phillips’ text is that he exhibits a preoccupation with sexuality that permeates the entire text and obscures his theory at times. Scholars can seemingly, and unknowingly at times, contribute to discourses that view transpeople as ‘fascinating’ objects of study, which ironically perpetuates a cinematic gaze that renders them as sexual objects. Phillips is complicit in treating trans subjects as sexual objects throughout his text because of his analytical focus on sexuality, particularly in his final chapter on “shemale internet pornography.” The second problem is that Phillips examines ten films for his book and squeezes these “transgender” films into three possible subgenres: transgender in comedy, psycho trans, and drama queens and macho men, but most of these films are binary trans films that focus on trans subjects within the binary. Also, these subgenres seem to indicate the stereotypical problems of trans films in the first place by focusing on problematic representations instead of potential liberatory and positive ones.

Another problem that I have with Phillips’ work and other film studies and gender studies scholars doing research in the area of trans representation in cinema is that they repeatedly analyze ‘popular’ films, three in particular: *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan 1992), *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme 1991) and *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock 1960). These films are over-analyzed, so I have made a choice to exclude these films from my analysis and to include more contemporary and under-analyzed filmic texts. I have also excluded the temporary transvestite films that make up Chris Straayer’s work and that Phillips focuses on in his first film analysis chapter (Chapter 3): *Some Like It Hot* (Billy Wilder 1959), *Tootsie*
(Sydney Pollack 1982) and Mrs. Doubtfire (Chris Columbus 1993) to name a few. These films, too, have been extensively over-analyzed, so I decided not to address them here.

Phillips also employs a psychoanalytic film studies lens to examine most of the films and I find this to be somewhat problematic for an analysis of trans representation because psychoanalysis is founded on the superior/inferior quality of the binary of sex and gender. This psychoanalytic filmic perspective as a methodological choice of the author also implies an emphasis on psychology as a way of understanding non-normative trans subjectivities. In other words, such an approach suggests that it is in the realm of psychology and psychoanalysis that we come to understand more clearly who transpeople are and how they come to know themselves. I do not find psychoanalytic film theory to be helpful in analyzing trans representation in cinema. My analysis is based in poststructuralist feminist theory and it is intentionally separated from, scientific, discourse that operates on empirical notions to reduce and assimilate subjects into rational categories. I do appreciate that Phillips does devote time to situating a distinction between sex, gender and sexuality and a discussion of various trans subjectivities in his first chapter. Finally, Phillips’ final chapter of the book on she-male (this term is highly problematic and transphobic) internet porn is entirely irrelevant to the rest of the book and seems to exist as a exploration of his personal fascination with the subject matter.  

My analysis of Transamerica, Boy Meets Girl, Normal, Dallas Buyer’s Club, Boys Don’t Cry, Laurence Anyways, The Danish Girl and Tangerine will be founded in film theory that works to evidence and support the transgender metanarrative. I will be examining trans films in the next chapter that challenge and disrupt the transgender metanarrative, but

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25 I write this as a transperson often critical of non-trans identified people, especially scholars, who are fascinated by the sexual components of our lives and who take up this fascination in a study that renders us as objects.
this chapter focuses on how these contemporary films work with thematic motifs and theoretical devices to capture a homogeneous notion of trans subjectivity on screen:

1). Double-vision/Trans Gaze: Halberstam’s theory of the ‘double vision,’ (“Transgender Look”) which is a multilayered transgender gaze in contrast to the traditional male gaze theorized by Laura Mulvey will be further developed in this section. Trans subjects in these films look at themselves in the diegetic world while we look at them from outside of the diegesis.

2). Telling THE trans story: They tell the trans story through narrative and autobiographical imperatives. As Jennifer Esposito writes in her analysis of Boys Don’t Cry, these representations are not just constructions but also reflections.

3). Body maps: The narratives are reworked as a multilayered text to further the notion of a double-vision with a focus on the body-language-culture-text in the solidification of a trans book to be read and understood as a subject. Therefore, trans subjectivity is written on the body in these cinematic texts.

4). Travelling Trans Subjects: There is also a thematic motif of travelling/nomadism in some of these binary trans films and also in the films that will be explored in Chapter Five. It is interesting to note that two other films with trans characters: Priscilla: Queen of the Desert (Stephan Elliott 1994) and To Wong Foo: Thanks for Everything! Julia Newmar (Beeban Kidron 1995) also represent this motif of traveling in relation to trans stories.²⁶

Each of the films analyzed in this section may or may not entirely fit in with the thematic motifs above. However, the four thematic motifs outlined are the most pervasive

²⁶ I understand that both of these films also contain drag queen characters that are not binary transgender but can be considered to exist under the trans umbrella.
cinematic devices at work in these films that relate to my theory of the transgender ideological cinematic apparatus as a way of perpetuating the transgender metanarrative.

*Boy Meets Girl* is an indie trans film from 2014 with a logline that reads: “For a woman in a man’s body, romance is tough. You think you’ve got it together, but your heart’s in for more surprises.” The film highlights the binary explicitly with its title and also confuses sex and gender in its logline, so the text is already illustrating some problematic aspects of trans representation. The lead actor of the film, Michelle Hendley, who plays protagonist Ricky is a self-identified trans woman and the film follows her interactions with family members, friends and lovers. The narrative focuses on Ricky’s romance with multiple lovers, particularly her budding relationship with her best friend from a platonic one to romance. Within the first few minutes of the film, Ricky implies that she has a “dick” in a conversation with AFAB-bodied Francesca (Alexandra Turshen) who eventually becomes Ricky’s lover. There are repeated shots of DANGER signs in a key setting that has some interesting theoretical implications for trans subjectivity. A scene follows a shot of a DANGER sign with Ricky and her best friend Robby (Michael Welch) in the forest where they swim in a lake. The thematic motif of a forest setting in both literature and film firmly sets the civilized/uncivilized binary in place implying that the trans subject of the film, Ricky, and her friends can only exist outside of civilization as a non-normative subject. Moreover, the forest and lake settings emphasize the focus on the flesh of the trans subject as if everything we need to know to understand transpeople is somehow written on the body that we can simply read. Ricky is shown in her bathing suit in the forest sitting in front of the lake in a scene where she comes out as trans to Francesca. Ricky is nervous to tell Francesca that she is transgender in a verbal way, so she has to send a text to her in this moment that reads: “I’m a transgender girl,” which signifies that it is the text/body that has to signal the
subjectivity as a form of confessional biographical imperative. This emphasis on the body is the key thematic motif of the film in explaining who Ricky is as a trans woman. Ricky tells Francesca in this scene that she plans on getting the full surgery, but it is expensive and that it isn’t about hating her body. However, this narrative accelerates my theory of an autobiographical imperative in these films. Ricky has just met Francesca and is already discussing very personal gender confirmation surgery and details about body (dis)-comfort. This scene is followed by a scene in Francesca’s bedroom with her transphobic fiancé, David (Michael Valente) on Skype where she tells him about her new trans friend Ricky. David articulates transphobic vitriol by calling Ricky a tranny and a freak, which is another key thematic motif of these binary trans films – they are always intent on representing vile hatred towards transpeople. Furthermore, key thematic motifs, also similar to the non-fiction (documentary) films that make up the next section of this chapter, are shots of Ricky taking hormone pills and measuring her breasts in the mirror. The shot of Ricky measuring her breasts in the mirror is specifically interesting in relation to the ‘double-vision’ theory because she watches herself in the mirror while the audience gazes at her in understanding trans subjectivity. However, her AMAB-bodied friend Robby (who is obviously sexually interested in her) attempts to gaze at her through a folding screen. So, there is a multilayered gaze on the trans subject while she focuses in on her trans subjectivity and I call this a trans-gaze expanding on the double-vision theorized by Halberstam.27 The trans gaze is more hybrid than the double-vision; however, it still places the trans subject into an inferior position of being watched by two gazes while she/he/they gaze upon themselves.

27 Thank you to Dr. Joshua Mostow for pushing me to consider the distinction between the double-vision versus the trans-gaze in this section on thematic motifs.
There is also a focus on family in this film, which is similar to many other trans films. We discover that Ricky’s Mother left the family because she was unsupportive of Ricky’s trans identity. However, the Father and little brother are both supportive and appreciative of who Ricky is. An emphasis on sexuality in relation to the trans subject is explored in various conversations because a sexual pyramid is formed with Ricky at the top and Robby, Francesca and David at the bottom as they have all had sexual relationships with her. Many of the discussions surrounding sexuality and what makes someone gay or straight are focused on biology in determining sexuality, not gender identity. The film raises an interesting question about what determines sexuality for a person, especially if they are sexually interested and/or involved with a transperson. This will be explored further in Chapter Six in terms of what sexuality means when it moves beyond the binary. Finally, the penultimate scene between Ricky and Robby, in the forest lake again (this time at night), emphasizes the intense focus and autobiographical imperative to have the body act as clarification to understand the transperson. Robby indicates interest in Ricky throughout the film, but it isn’t until he can see her completely naked in this scene where he can fully exist in the reality of his feelings. Robby watches Ricky swim in the water and they discuss having feelings for one another. Ricky then exits the water and her entire body is on display. Indeed, Ricky’s body exemplifies the logline of the film if one were to read it literally: as a body with a penis with the gender identity of a woman. Ricky asks Robby if he stills thinks she’s beautiful and he responds: “You are so beautiful.” They proceed to enact a love scene in the woods. This film is a positive and hopeful story of survival, but it participates in some key thematic motifs that support a Transgender Metanarrative and some of these themes are key in other binary trans films that will be analyzed in this section.
The Danish Girl is arguably the most high-profile trans film ever released considering its cast, director, financing and critical acclaim. The film was nominated for four Academy Awards and won one for Alicia Vikander’s portrayal of Gerda Wegener (Best Supporting Actress). I will demonstrate through my film analysis that The Danish Girl is preoccupied with the thematic motifs in the other binary trans films to tell the trans metanarrative with these ‘acts of transgender.’ The film is a fictional retelling of Lili Elbe’s life as a transperson in the early twentieth century. Elbe is considered to be one of the first recipients of gender confirmation surgery, which ended up being the cause of her death. The film opens and ends on shots of nature: waterscapes, wind traveling through trees and mountain ranges. Clearly these important shots recollect Elbe’s focus on nature as a painter; however, they also function to set this story outside of the civilized in the time period of 1925. The film demonstrates that European culture in the 1920s views any subversion of sex and gender normativity as a serious pathology. Elbe meets with various doctors throughout the film and most of them administer brutal medical procedures (radiation therapy mostly) to try and ‘cure’ her of her transgender identity. Therefore, the film opens and ends on these nature shots to remind the audience that Elbe was only able to be free outside of culture, in nature where she ends up flying free in the last shot of the film. The film sets up a very strict dichotomy between male (man) and female (woman) in the diegesis vis-à-vis both cinematic devices and narrative motifs. Elbe’s lover, Gerda, and her friend Ulla (Amber Heard) both function as clear examples of the female body and womanhood to starkly contrast against Elbe’s male-sexed body. The double-vision and trans gaze is employed here to articulate the binary. In one scene early in the film, Elbe (then identifying not by choice as Einar Wegener) watches Ulla (a dancer) from a distance in a theatre space while she dances. Elbe takes the place of a scopophilic perspective hidden and framed in the shot by white-laced
dresses. The film literally frames Elbe with femininity while she gazes upon Ulla’s female body and feminine gender expression. However, the focus of the audience’s gaze is doubled because we are able to see point-of-view shots from Elbe’s perspective on Ulla and other women in the diegesis whom she gazes upon and mimics. The audience is also able to gaze upon Elbe engaging with her scopophilic desire, which is an interesting type of double-vision in enabling a superior subject position for the binary trans subject. In a subsequent scene, Gerda, who finds work as a portrait artist, sketches a man in her studio. The man is experiencing discomfort with the vulnerability of the situation whereby he must submit to the gaze of Gerda. Gerda mentions in this scene that it is difficult for a “man to submit to a woman’s gaze.” So, the focus on the gaze is an important thematic motif of this film and others analyzed. There are countless shots of Elbe gazing upon herself in a mirror similar to all of the binary trans films where she tells the trans story by expressing her feminine gender.

I want to focus on the initiation of Elbe’s trans story in *The Danish Girl*, which I believe articulates the film’s priority to suggest that the sex and gender binary is inescapable. Elbe’s trans story begins when Gerda asks her to pose for a portrait of Ulla. Ulla is unable to attend the sitting, so Gerda needs Elbe to try on stockings, high heels and the dress that Ulla wears in the portrait. This scene initiates Elbe’s trans metanarrative journey. Elbe has a realization in this scene in that she is not comfortable with her male-sexed body and enforced masculine gender expression, albeit Elbe’s gender expression is arguably mostly feminine and/or fluid throughout the entire film. However, the problem with this realization scene is that some binary transpeople can be aware of their need to bring their sexed-body in line with their gender identity early on in their life. Therefore, why does this scene where Elbe dresses in ‘women’s’ clothes for the first time act as her moment of realization? Perhaps this realization scene functions as a narrative device to hook the audience into the
moment of Elbe’s change where her transition begins, but it reduces the trans story to a simplistic understanding of gender identity and gender expression. The other problem with this film’s attempt at telling Elbe’s trans story is that Ulla names Lili rather than Lili naming herself. The naming of oneself for some transpeople is a very personal and important moment. *The Danish Girl* strips Elbe’s autonomy from her by having someone else do the naming.

The thematic motif of body maps is also evident in this film whereby the bodies of the characters participates in reducing sex and gender to a binary. Elbe is fascinated by the female body in the diegesis and seems to absorb feminine gendered mannerisms by mimicking them in the moment (putting on make-up, hand placements, body placement, walking in heels, hair), which she later expresses in subsequent scenes. For example, Gerda’s AFAB body is on display to serve as a contrast to Elbe’s AMAB body. Both of these bodies are mapped out for the viewer to cement an understanding of one or the other and that this is the area of concern for Elbe. In particular, Elbe’s body is on full display at the same theatre space where she escapes to take off all of her clothes in one scene in front of a mirror. Elbe tucks her penis and stands in full view of the mirror so that the viewer clearly understands the changes Elbe wants to make. The camera in this scene tilts up and down Elbe’s body to show parts and then cuts to a full-length static shot of her entire body in the mirror with her penis tucked behind her legs. The emphasis on genitalia here to tell the trans story is similar to the other binary trans films analyzed in this chapter.

*The Danish Girl* also emphasizes traveling in relation to the binary trans narrative because Elbe must escape Denmark as physicians want to institutionalize her. Elbe and Gerda travel to Paris where Gerda achieves success as a painter by selling portraits of Lili. This point in the narrative begins to focus on a split-persona between Lili and Einar as Gerda
and Lili both speak of Lili and Einar as separate people. Gerda states “Lili doesn’t exist. We made her up. We were playing a game.” In addition, when Gerda and Lili visit with Lili’s childhood friend Hans Axgil (Matthias Schoenearts), Lili pretends to be “Einar’s” female cousin. That night, Lili wants to go to sleep in the feminine gender expression as herself, but Gerda says “Lili’s never spent the night.” Lili explains that she is and has never been Einar. She states “when I dream, they’re Lili’s dreams.” The split personality suggests that it is only possible to be one or the other, but it also reiterates a motif in telling the binary trans story whereby there is a death of the enforced sex/gender and a birth of who the transperson was truly born as. The traveling motif suggests that the binary transperson must be mobile in their transition since Lili finds the medical help she needs in Professor Warnekros (Sebastian Koch) by traveling from Paris to Berlin. Warnekros was one of the only physicians under Magnus Hirschfeld’s guidance at this time in history who treated transpeople not to cure them but to help them realize their transgender subjectivity. Warnekros explains that the surgery has never been done before and that Lili will need two surgeries: one to remove all of the male genitalia and another (when she is stronger) to construct a vagina. Prior to the first operation, Lili says to Warnekros, “this is not my body, professor. Please take it away.” Tragically, Lili dies in a garden with Gerda after her second operation. The film was adapted from Lili Elbe’s diaries entitled “Man Into Woman” published in 1933, so more work in comparing her diaries with the film’s fictional retelling could strengthen some of the film analysis outlined in relation to the four cinematic devices evident in the film and other binary trans films: double-vision/trans gaze, telling the trans story (through both verbal discussions and actions, particularly taking hormone pills, surgery, healthcare discussions related to transition), body maps (emphasis on the body in the diegesis) and travelling in relation to the trans subjects as bodies-in-motion.
Duncan Tucker’s *Transamerica* was produced in 2006 and is one of the first trans films to receive critical acclaim that forecasted a transgender pop culture phenomenon to come a few years later. The film follows a pre-operative male-to-female transsexual named Bree (Felicity Huffman) “who takes an unexpected journey when she learns that she fathered a son, now a teenage runaway hustling on the streets of New York” (IMDB Transamerica). The film begins with the thematic motifs of double-vision and the body map (in a similar way that *Boys Don’t Cry* positions this early on in the film as well) as the viewer is able to hear transwoman protagonist Bree practice her vocal range and see various shots of her body parts in close-up before her face is finally revealed, so the trans gaze is preoccupied with a fragmented body that works to communicate gender rather than the whole. There are several shots of Bree in front of mirrors in the film. Bree goes on to list all the bodily modification surgery that she has received and it is clear that she is close to receiving her gender confirmation surgery. There are shots of Bree taking hormone pills and scenes with her psychiatrist. The focus on the medical imperative for binary transpeople is situated as one of the key components of the film’s exposition, which propagates the biographical imperative for transpeople as an enforced intimate confession of their private details in order to achieve recognition and necessary healthcare. This is a clear example of the telling trans story trope evident in these binary trans films. The traveling trans subject is one of the central components of the film’s narrative because most of the story revolves around Bree and her son’s road trip from one side of the country to the other, so the story denotes transition within the traveling as if the audience travels with the trans subject on their journey from beginning to end. This journey from beginning to end strikes an interesting parallel with the traditional narrative structure of film in terms of a three-act structure with a beginning, middle and end, so this type of binary Transgender Metanarrative seems to be complemented
by a traditional filmic structure that supports a linear journey. In a similar way to *Boy Meets Girl*, *Transamerica* also depicts the trans subject in forest and wood settings whereby the trans subject is articulated as outside of civilization. A scene in a restaurant invokes an interesting motif that will be further explored in Chapter Five in relation to children and gender. Bree is alone at the table waiting for her son to return and a child turns around and gazes at her with a puzzled expression. The young child asks Bree: “Are you a boy or a girl?” Now this question understandably upsets Bree and would upset any binary transperson who identifies with one side of the binary; however, the film signifies a sort of grey area here about gender expression and how children are often the ones who are curious about this diversity. Another key thematic motif that is also depicted in *Boy Meets Girl, Boys Don’t Cry, Laurence Anyways, Dallas Buyer’s Club* and of course the infamous reveal shot in *The Crying Game* is the nude or almost nude reveal of the trans subject in a long shot that enables the viewer to map the trans character’s body in understanding their trans corporeality. Bree and her son stop for a bathroom break on the side of the road and we see Bree urinating from her penis through the car’s rear view mirror via the gaze of her son. Transwomen are on full display for the audience in these films. The reveal of the phallus or lack thereof of the binary transperson is an imperative in these films in line with mapping the body of the trans subject and telling their story through clear images of the body. *Transamerica* also features the motifs of transphobia and bigotry and a family’s disgust or disapproval of the trans protagonist, which *Boys Don’t Cry* is infamous for representing.

*Boys Don’t Cry* invokes all of the thematic motifs evident in other films in this section. The film focuses on the real-life depiction of the tragic murder of transman Brandon Teena played by Hillary Swank in the film. Jennifer Esposito argues the viewer of the film is interpellated as “gender (border) inspectors” (232) alongside the characters of the film who
inspect and police Brandon’s gender. I believe this film is somewhat dangerous in its
depiction of trans subjectivity because it emphasizes the violent acts committed to Brandon,
detailing them in explicit form for the viewer in sensationalist cinematic ways or as Esposito
calls it the “Hollywood commodification of the brutal and garish death of Brandon” (238) –
the rape of Brandon, the molestation, the violation and the eventual murder. However, the
film is arguably the most critically acclaimed trans film and deserves to be analyzed even
though it has received considerable criticism and analysis in academia similar to The Crying
Game. Boys Don’t Cry reifies the traveling trans subject, double vision, telling trans story
and body map thematic motifs of these binary trans films. The film depicts Brandon driving
down roads several times throughout the narrative and the shots of cars, roads, traveling and
Brandon being manipulated by his murderers are often shown while he or others are driving.
Furthermore, other transient spaces are reiterated throughout the film, particularly bars,
which is similar to Dallas Buyer’s Club, Laurence Anyways and Boy Meets Girl. The first
time the viewer sees Brandon is in a reflection of the rearview mirror of the car and shortly
afterwards is a scene of Brandon in front of a bedroom mirror with his friend who is
watching him in the background. Brandon tucks in full view for the audience to explicitly
portray the lack of his phallus. Clearly, this film contains the most explicit depiction of
transphobia in any other trans film, so the violence surrounding Brandon’s body is a
hyperbolic continuation of the theme of transphobia in these binary trans films. In fact,
Brandon’s body is on full display in the film to aid in the policing of his gender not just on
the part of the viewer, but also the characters in the film. The love scene in the film “works
to display Brandon to the viewers through the eyes of his rapists/murderers. Brandon is not a
boy. Brandon is a dyke after all” (Esposito 237) and “why would Brandon want to have sex
within hours of rape?” (Halberstam “In a queer time and place” 90). The love scene directly
after the rape furthers the need to expose the body in order to tell the trans story.

Consequently, the film participates in a form of transphobia by suggesting through various scenes, such as the violent ones involving Brandon and the title, that Brandon is not really a boy. Esposito states that “Boys Don’t Cry is an imperative of masculinity. Girls cry but boys do not. However, Brandon cries numerous times during the film. His murderers do not. Girls cry. Boys don’t cry. The title works to remind us that Brandon is not a boy. It works to reinscribe hegemonic masculinity on to the murderers and some kind of failed attempt at masculinity on to Brandon” (238). I agree that the title seems to be transphobic considering the literal meaning of it within the diegesis as Esposito has noted, but I believe that the autobiographical imperative of telling the trans story relies on an alignment of gender identity (man, woman or non-binary) with gender expression (masculine, feminine, androgyny) to be truth. In other words, it is imperative that binary transpeople align their gender identity with their gender expression in order to be believed as a ‘true’ binary transperson. Therefore, this is obviously problematic, as one does not need to express the ‘proper’ gender expression conflated with gender identity in order to be trans. For example, one can express a feminine gender and still identify as a man and vice versa, so Esposito’s criticism here implies that Brandon’s lack of masculine representation somehow conflicts with his trans subjectivity. Is it the biological body that betrays Brandon in the end of the film (Esposito 239)? Esposito draws on Chris Straayer to state that “this focus on the physical, this ‘siting’ of Brandon’s body, exists to reinforce/reestablish the binary of male-female, the ideology of biologically distinct bodies” (238). So, the film is participating in the conflation of sex, gender identity and gender expression to suggest that Brandon cannot exist beyond the boundaries of his sexed-biological-body. The inability for the audience and the characters to see beyond his body is what ends his life because he is in effect an
unintelligible subject. Brandon’s body is not an eroticized object in the film. His body is part of the imperative of telling the trans story and mapping it for the viewer in corporeal form. In contrast, the film eroticizes Brandon’s lover Lana (Chloë Sevigny), which “helps to recuperate the film for a mainstream audience by reinforcing conventional binarisms (male spectator – female character)” (Phillips 146). Thus, Boys Don’t Cry illustrates two versions of the gaze. On the one hand, the film portrays the double-vision/trans gaze exemplified in this section of my dissertation and on the other hand, it deploys the traditional Hollywood male gaze to satisfy a wider audience. The double vision of the trans gaze in this film enables the viewer “to look with the transgender character instead of at him” (Halberstam “In a queer time and place” 78); while the male gaze satisfies the looking at scopophilic seat of desire rather than the ‘looking with’ quality associated with the trans gaze. I would argue that the double vision of the trans gaze enables both a looking with and looking at notion of spectatorship in that it opens a space for the audience both to examine and to question what is being gazed upon while opening a space to look with the character vis-à-vis motifs like the mirror. Halberstam states that “Peirce’s film, in fact, opens the door to a nonfetishistic mode of seeing the transgender body – a mode that looks with, rather than at, the transgender body and cultivates the multidimensionality of an indisputably transgender gaze” (“In a queer time and place” 92). This multidimensional quality of the double-vision and trans gaze is furthered in the final two films analyzed in this section of Chapter Four: Dallas Buyer’s Club and Laurence Anyways.

Dallas Buyer’s Club and Laurence Anyways are both independent binary trans films from the US and Francophone-Canada respectively. Dallas Buyer’s Club arguably initiated the debate regarding whether or not assumptive cisgender actors should play trans roles. The film furthers the thematic motifs of binary trans films evidenced by my previous film
analysis, particularly it represents the mirror and the double-vision of the trans subject to map the trans body in order to assist in telling the trans story. The trans character in this film, Rayon, is not the protagonist, but is a vital part of the main character Ron’s (Matthew McConaughey) storyline based on Ron’s attempt to work around the problematic medical systems’ treatment of HIV and AIDS patients in Dallas in 1985 by getting them proper medication. Ron meets Rayon in a hospital as the film’s narrative is focused on the HIV-epidemic told from the perspective of a heterosexual non-trans AMAB-bodied person.

However, this first scene with Rayon reaffirms medical discourse as one of the primary components of the transperson’s story for the viewer. The multidimensionality of the trans gaze is furthered in this film. For example, a scene in the same hospital with Rayon’s doctor (played by Jennifer Garner) shows Rayon in a medium long-two-shot with the doctor. The viewer gazes on Rayon, but then a subsequent shot depicts another patient in the background gazing on Rayon. The scene is acted out, the doctor leaves and Rayon then closes a curtain dividing her space from the other patient, but it also hides Rayon from the audience. Therefore, this scene signifies that Rayon was not only performing and/or being gazed upon by the doctor and the audience, but also the other patient and that she had self-awareness of this multidimensional gaze by ‘closing the curtain’ so to speak. The traveling motif is also represented in a scene where Rayon is sitting in a car with Ron. Rayon gets out of the car while Ron watches her from a distance as she walks through the town. The sound of a train horn is then heard in the distance. The sound of the train adds a layer of audio connotation within the diegesis to highlight that the trans subject is both traveling (walking) with the additional audio layering sound-effect of the horn. This train horn can also function as a whistle or ‘cat calling’ of Rayon, which furthers the gaze upon her. The mirror in Rayon’s hotel room/office where Ron and her do business selling illegal HIV-medication to people
buying into Ron’s club is an interesting motif of the film and reiterates the double-vision of
the trans gaze in telling Rayon’s story. Around the mirror are pictures of glam rocker and
gender-bender Marc Bolan and feminine-looking people in dated beauty shots. The mirror in
this setting of the film functions to posit three types of gazes within and without the diegesis:
Rayon gazing at herself, her gaze upon the images around her mirror, the audience on Rayon
and other characters watching Rayon in the mirror. The characters in the film use he/him/his
pronouns for Rayon and Rayon does not correct them, but does seem to imply that she wants
to be a woman via gender confirmation surgery. In a scene imbued with transphobia related
to the family (another leitmotif of these films), Rayon visits her father in a masculine gender
presentation in a suit and tie with her hair slicked back free of make-up. After this scene,
Rayon is shown in her hotel room in a near-naked long-shot where the audience sees her
entire body in underwear in front of a mirror. The body again is mapped for the viewer
biologically in contrast to the gender expression that is in complete opposition in terms of a
normative understanding of gender and sex. Rayon does meet a tragic end in the film by
succumbing to AIDS and dies in the hospital. Rayon’s death scene signifies both the
metamorphosis of the trans subject and reaffirms the importance of the double-vision trans
gaze to signify this part of the trans story. While Rayon takes her final breaths, Ron is
depicted in a set standing amongst thousands of butterflies as they fly around and cover his
body. The final shot of Rayon is shown to us through a compact mirror as Rayon drops her
powder brush and it falls on the ground to signify her death. This is a powerful scene that
illustrates the trans gaze in action to see with the trans subject as a way of empathizing with
her situation near-death while the butterflies around Ron signify perhaps the end of Rayon’s
tragic journey or a never-will-be accomplished full transition from what is hinted at
throughout the scene to confirm her gender identity as a woman.
Laurence Anyways furthers the multidimensionality of the trans gaze, but this film is aesthetically rich in its symbolic signifiers considering that Xavier Dolan uses moving images in both static and fluid ways to paint the picture of the narrative. The film charts ten years of relationships experienced by a male-to-female transsexual (as listed on the film’s blu-ray cover). The opening sequence takes the trans gaze to an interesting and unique realm of spectatorship in understanding the trans protagonist. Several random people are shown in successive shots in medium close-up as they look directly into the camera’s eye. The camera is meant to function here as the trans subject, but it is juxtaposed against the camera acting as the characters gazing on the trans subject. So, the camera fluctuates in this opening sequence from both assuming the position of the gazed upon trans subject and the gazed upon person gazing upon the trans subject. The multifaceted characteristic of the gaze is complimented by special-effects fogging that obscures the trans subject from coming into full view for the audience, so the people gazing in the diegesis upon the trans subject see more than the audience does at this point. This provocative multidimensional situating of the trans subject via various perspectives of the gaze transitions to a shot of Laurence sitting in her kitchen in underwear with a title that reads “10 years earlier.” The film maintains its preoccupation with this multifaceted trans gaze during scenes in Laurence’s school where she gazes upon AFAB-bodied people in her class while they play with their long hair. A scene of Laurence shaving his face in a mirror precedes this scene. Laurence walks down hallways and one-shots of people gazing at him are pictured in slideshow format in a way that replicates the opening sequence of the film. The multiplicity of what could be considered homogeneous perspectives on Laurence in the flurry of one-shots works as an interesting cinematic device to situate the camera while the trans subject is in motion and the spectators are not. The shots are mostly static but the editing in terms of the rhythm of the
faces and the cuts are fluid. When Laurence’s trans subjectivity starts to become clear for both the audience and the characters and herself as a transperson, voice-over of Laurence telling her story to a reporter is heard over the images. Laurence discusses her life and who she is, so this reinforces the autobiographical imperative of binary trans films to tell the trans story. Laurence comes out to her lover Fred (Suzanne Clément) in a car while it is going through a car wash, which signifies traveling as part of the narrative; however, this scene also adds an interesting dimension to the confessional quality of the telling trans story thematic motif of these films. The actual linguistic utterance of “I am trans/transgender” is not depicted on camera, so the confessional cleansing of one’s self-identification in coming out is only suggested on the level of connotation rather than explicit verbal enunciation. Dolan decides to remove the actual confession of identity from the film and this definitely challenges the clearly articulated component of coming out as a transperson evident in the other binary trans films studied so far. However, we do know that this confession does take place as the impact on Fred and her family and friends is depicted clearly. There are several shots of Laurence looking in mirrors, particularly one looking in a compact mirror and explicit transphobia directed at her by strangers, friends and family.

I will end my analysis of these films with *Tangerine.* I have previously discussed that this film breaks from the casting convention of a non-identified transperson by casting a trans-identified actor of colour into a trans role/character. However, the film also disrupts some of the thematic motifs evidenced by the other trans films in this chapter while simultaneously employing some of the motifs in order to tell its narrative. The film focuses on two trans prostitutes in Los Angeles named Alexandra and Sin-Dee both racialized transpeople of colour (mixed race, Black and Hispanic) and the narrative takes place in one night. Sin-Dee has just been released from prison and is on a literal traveling journey
throughout the narrative to find her pimp-lover Chester (James Ronsone) as she finds out that he’s been cheating on her with a “fish” – derogatory term for non-trans woman -- while she has been imprisoned. The film is technically groundbreaking, especially for a trans film, for its use of an iPhone as a camera. The cinematography is remarkable as the mobility of the iPhone travels with Sin-Dee and Alexandra as a third entity throughout the diegetic world as the narrative progresses. The iPhone camera and cinematography signify a third body existing within the space that shines on spotlight on these two characters by framing them within the mise-en-scene of the streets of Los Angeles illuminated by prismatic rays of light via the sun, street lamps, windows, which signifies a fragmentation of character and subjectivity. The iPhone’s ability in its small and compact mobile form compared to large camera equipment set-ups works to create a body within the diegetic space that captures all of the action and positions the characters in front of natural lighting. This simplistic and mobile technical set-up becomes a partner to these characters in their journeys throughout the narrative. *Tangerine* exhibits the motif of the traveling trans subject, particularly with Sin-Dee, as there are rare moments in the film where she actually stops traveling (walking) through the streets of Los Angeles. The iPhone camera/body is able to frenetically dash and dart with Sin-Dee to maintain a pacing that suggests the urgency of Sin-Dee’s objective to find her lover. The music of the film also reflects this frenetic traveling and movement – it constantly shifts with the subject in tone and beat. The film also employs the telling of the trans story and body map motif, but in subtle ways that disrupt the intense focus on these aspects of binary trans films in the other texts analyzed thus far. The film begins with Alexandra and Sin-Dee discussing hormones and their bodies and this prepares the audience for an expectation of exposition related to their subjectivities not just in the literal sense but also the visual by picturing their bodies in relation to their trans identities and expressions.
The film challenges the double-vision/trans gaze by both featuring this minimally (in a
bathroom scene where Sin-Dee and Alexandra discuss make-up) and then imploding it
entirely in a scene on the street where two people stare at Sin-Dee and she quickly counters
the gaze and says “What the fuck you looking at?” This talking-back to the gaze is a break
from the enforced double-vision that has been evidenced by other trans films in this section.
Sin-Dee not only talks back to the gaze, but she is hyper-aware of it and is not afraid to
challenge this intrusive common public occurrence for transpeople. The film presents a harsh
reality for many transpeople, particularly transpeople of colour who are marginalized due to
their intersectional identities and then even further marginalized as sex workers. *Tangerine*
presents this reality without any filters. The only filters that exist are ones of verisimilitude
that shine a spotlight on transpeople who are marginalized due to their race, gender and
class. The film ends on a scene with both Sin-Dee and Alexandra at a laundromat after a
group of transphobic people throw a cup of urine on Sin-Dee’s face. The two retreat to the
laundromat to clean Sin-Dee’s clothes and wig. Sin-Dee has to undress and Alexandra also
participates in this to make Sin-Dee more comfortable. The final shot is of Sin-Dee and
Alexandra sitting in a two-shot facing the camera exposed and authentic in the representation
of two transpeople playing trans roles. They are facing the camera (albeit not in a direct
address) while we are facing them as the audience in a cultural exchange that will arguably
change the landscape of trans representation.

Throughout my analysis of these binary trans films, I have provided extensive
support for the four primary thematic motifs of these films (double-vision/trans gaze, telling
trans story, body maps and traveling trans subjects) that work to support my theory of the
homogeneous and exclusionary transgender metanarrative. I have also highlighted a binary
trans film, *Tangerine*, that breaks from some of these motifs in talking back to the gaze and
less of a focus on the body to tell THE trans story while still employing some of them to tell its story. I want to turn to non-fiction film (documentaries) to highlight that this pop culture manifestation of the Transgender Metanarrative occurs not only in fiction but also non-fiction films that deploy homogeneous notions of trans subjectivity to the public that works as a cultural feedback loop to limit and constrain understandings of the diversity of transpeople.
To Tell The Trans Story is To Speak Alongside every(Body): Binary Trans Documentaries

Trinh T. Minh-ha states that “documentary is said to have come about as a need to inform the people (Dziga Vertov’s Kino-Pravda or Camera Truth)” and it “takes real people and real problems from the real world and deals with them” (33). Minh-ha draws on Hans Richter to suggest that documentary film “is an original art form” because through the “selection, elimination and coordination of natural elements, a film form evolves which is original and not bound by theatrical or literary tradition” (33). A documentary film is “shot with three cameras: the camera in a technical sense; the filmmaker’s mind; and generic patterns of documentary film” (Minh-ha 39). Thus, a documentary film involves a complex and multilayered methodological understanding of representation. Representation in this sense involves more traditional and formal filmmaking methods, the theoretical analysis of these methods while in the stages of production and an analysis of the formal structure of documentary film. The concept of reality in relation to documentary filmmaking has been an ongoing discussion in film studies (Chapman; Cowie; Minh-ha; Gaines). A brief discussion of reality and documentary is necessary before moving forward with formal methods employed in documentary films that include trans subjects. Jane Chapman states that “capturing actuality should not be confused with capturing reality” (8). And, Elizabeth Cowie discusses the camera and reality. “Documentary, in presenting the sights and sounds of reality, enables reality to ‘speak’ at the same time as it ‘speaks about’ reality” (Cowie 1). Further, “the camera eye functions here not only as a mastering, all-seeing view but also as a prosthesis, an aid and supplement to our vision whereby we are shown a reality that our human perceptual apparatus cannot perceive” (Cowie 2). Minh-ha believes that “reality is more fabulous, more maddening, more strangely manipulative than fiction” (39). Finally,
Jane M. Gaines draws on Siegfried Kracauer’s famous assertion that “what the camera captures is more real than reality itself” (“The Real Returns” 4). Therefore, documentary filmmaking is a heightened version of reality, which enables components of reality to be actualized. Gaines states that “films often make their appeal through the senses to the senses, circumventing the intellect” (Political Mimesis 92). Do documentary filmmakers have to be objective when approaching their research subjects if the appeal is to the senses rather than the rational/intellectual mind?

The formal techniques of a documentary can include testimony, which includes interviews “whether the interviewee is represented on or off camera (with the use of voice-over) and voice-over presenter address which involves narration” (Chapman 10). There is also always a choice of whether or not to include oneself as a filmmaker in the documentary in terms of self-reflexivity and/or more extensive ways of connecting with positionality. Gaines writes how the ‘crisis of representation’ “signaled a focus on ‘who represents and who is represented’” (7). And, Minh-ha states that a “subject who points to him/her/itself as subject-in-process, a work that displays its own formal properties or its own constitution as work, is bound to upset one’s sense of identity” (48). Cowie’s theory of the camera eye as a prosthesis is a critical methodological way of understanding how filmmaking can enrich traditional methods used in sociological, anthropological and cultural studies research that attempts to understand trans subjects (2). The notion that some transpeople exist outside of the sex and gender binary could seem like a fantasy to society; therefore, the camera lens as a prosthetic intervention challenges the binary concept of fantasy and reality. Cowie states that the “mechanical eye, the photographic lens, while it intrigues and fascinates, functions also as a guarantor of the identity of the visible with the normality of vision” (7). Furthermore, the “documentary filmmaker asserts that not only what she says but also what
she shows is not imaginary” (Cowie 28). Cowie draws on Michel Foucault to suggest that “the facts, in fact, cannot speak for themselves. Rather, we make them ‘speak’ by our contextual knowledge and understanding within specific institutional social frames” (26).

“Even if we defer to at least some of the natural world, conceding that it is ‘the real,’ even if we give the body the last word, the body cannot speak without the benefit of our intervening discourses” (Gaines “The Real Returns” 11). Consequently, the intervening discourses and social frames depend upon the methods documentary filmmakers employ to represent their subjects.

Christine Milliken’s research indicates that female-to-male transsexuals are left out of trans documentary projects; the focus is usually on the male-to-female transsexual (“Unheimlich Manuevers” n.p.). Milliken states that the “focus dates back to the MTF of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, particularly Christine Jorgensen, Jan Morris and Renee Richards’ narratives” (47). Milliken’s focus is on the autobiographies of these transpeople and how their narratives have cemented a homogeneous understanding of transpeople as only binary transpeople. In terms of methods, Milliken states that “the gendered performances that these documentaries deploy include autobiographical testimony characterized by talking heads and an emphasis on the movement and display of the body which enacts/perform a gender” (48). Milliken follows Shelley’s theory (28) that transsexual people “must know and say the right things – or create the ‘right’ narrative – in order to receive their hormones” (53). How has this ‘right’ narrative contributed to a homogeneous understanding of transpeople that excludes those who challenge the sex and gender binary? Furthermore, how do the themes of trans documentaries work in conjunction with their methods/techniques to represent trans subjects? Cynthia Fuchs states that queer documentaries “engage in rewriting subjects as
objects ‘of study’” and insists “on a system of binary difference that obscures complexities and incongruities of lived relations” (193).

This section will work to elaborate on the methods used in trans documentaries. The majority of the filmmaking methods employed in trans documentaries highlight thematic motifs and methods that work to construct a Transgender Metanarrative that feeds into a homogeneous understanding of transgender people. The documentary films (most of them expository in form) 100% Woman (Karen Duthie 2004), Becoming Ayden (2004), Becoming Chaz (Bailey and Barbato 2011), Boy I Am (Feder and Hollar 2006), Girl Inside (Gallus 2007), Middle Sexes (Thomas 2005) and She’s a Boy I Knew (Haworth 2007) follow a checklist of motifs and methods in order to represent trans subjects.

Voice-over narration is a common method used in all of these films, except for Becoming Chaz. The voice-over narration can be an unknown/abstract voice (100% Woman, Middle Sexes), the voice of the trans subject or subjects (Boy I Am, Girl Inside, She’s a Boy I Knew), and the voice of the subject and/or filmmaker (Becoming Ayden). In addition, the voice-over narration is typically employed while family images are depicted on the screen in slideshow form of the trans subject before transitioning and/or connecting with their transsexual subjectivity. The filmmaker is almost always invisible and off-camera during the entire film (Middle Sexes, Girl Inside, Boy I Am, Becoming Chaz, 100% Woman), which raises areas of concern about reflexivity and positionality. The only film that features the filmmaker is She’s a Boy I Knew because the film is based on the filmmaker’s autobiographical transition. All of the films employ stock footage of the trans subject’s childhood and/or adolescence. The talking heads included in the films aside from the trans subject are often the friends and family of the trans subject who typically act as a transphobic voice or, rarely, as supportive after ‘coming to terms’ with their trans family
member. Another technique is to represent the trans subject in action either playing sports, walking and/or doing activities that illustrate the body’s importance in relation to understanding gender. In terms of cinematography, handheld cameras are used to follow the trans subject, which mimics a fly-on-the-wall approach to documentary filmmaking; however, tripods, static cameras and/or dollies are primarily used during the interview segments. The interview segments are usually framed in medium close-up to close-up, which can be invasive at times especially considering the personal stories being told on camera (Boy I Am, 100% Woman, Girl Inside). Inter-titles and quotations are depicted against black screens to break up segments of the film that often parallel the transsexual subject’s linear journey of transitioning with a beginning middle and end. In addition, direct address is used as a form of video diary that enables the transsexual subjects to speak directly to the camera as they discuss their experiences and emotions related to transitioning (Girl Inside, 100% Woman).

These methods work to construct representational motifs in the diegesis that feed a transgender metanarrative. The motifs observed in these documentary films are:

- MTF transsexual person
- FTM transsexual person
- partner, family and friends involvement in the narrative (often transphobic reactions to trans subject)
- ‘transition or die’ narrative
- news reports about trans subject
- inclusion of notable transsexual subjects in history (Renee Richards)
- explicit discussion about genitalia and the body
- the mirror and the gaze (Fuchs 191)
• explicit shots of trans subject’s body
• explicit surgery show and tell (includes footage of surgeries in operating room)
• hormone replacement therapy (explicit shots of injections)
• transition narrative with a beginning, middle and end
• medical professionals as experts, cultural informants
• ‘new body’ narrative

These motifs work to construct a trans metanarrative in documentary filmmaking that contributes to the confessional autobiographical imperative and importance of stories. A closer analysis of some of these thematic motifs and methods in the films will identify the foundation of this metanarrative and its productive power to disseminate a homogeneous way of understanding transpeople in society very similar to the binary trans fiction film representation analyzed thus far.

100% Woman focuses on a mountain-bike athlete named Michelle Dumaraesq and states that she “became the first open transgender woman in the world to be named to a national team in any sport.” However, the title implies that she is a binary transwoman, but Michelle self-identifies as ‘transsexual’ in the film. Therefore, the subject’s identification conflicts with the filmmakers’ enforcement of an identity that does not seem to fit Michelle’s own understanding of herself, which is an example of a trend that attempts to constrain all transpeople within the trendy term of transgender. The film’s thematic motifs construct a narrative about the conflict between Michelle’s transsexual identity and the AFAB-bodied athletes that challenge her right to compete at the national level of mountain-bike racing because the majority of her athletic colleagues do not consider Michelle to be a ‘real
woman.’ Michelle’s parents and friends also participate in the structuring of her narrative and identity. Why is the parental involvement in these transsexual documentaries so important? The parental and familial involvement is also exhibited in *Becoming Ayden, Becoming Chaz, Boy I Am, Girl Inside and She’s a Boy I Knew*. Can the trans subject not speak for themself?28

*Becoming Ayden* is a documentary produced by Alex Berk in the UK and distributed by the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). The film employs many of the typical methods articulated to sensationalize and objectify trans subjects29. The film disseminates very dangerous messages about transpeople to the Canadian public (and beyond) under the disguise of education. The film begins by focusing on an FTM trans youth named Ayden (age twelve and pre-transition during the filming of this documentary) and his journey of “becoming a boy.” Cultural informants (“health and gender experts”) are employed, but the journalist appearing on camera and providing voice-over narration constrains the interviewee’s responses by framing the discussions in a negative fashion in relation to transsexual subjectivity. The parents and friends of the trans subject in this film are transphobic and shown “grieving” for their lost child. Furthermore, the voice-over narration from the journalist’s perspective lays judgment on the trans subject by considering transphobic reactions to the trans subject as warranted and understandable. The only cultural informant that does not participate in the transphobic reactions of the talking heads is Dr. Aaron H. Devor (who is self-identified as trans) of the University of Victoria who seems to

28 I am using the gender-neutral pronoun they/their/them in this instance when positing questions about transpeople in general. This is in no way meant to challenge transsexual people who exist within the binary and use a male or female pronoun to self-identify.

29 *Becoming Ayden* was also very difficult to obtain. There are no end credits in the film, but CBC was able to provide production information after I contacted them directly. However, I wonder if the film’s problematic content has anything to do with the fact that the film seems to have vanished from the CBC’s library.
be a minority voice in an attempt to understand rather than demonize the trans subjects that are represented in this documentary film. The majority of talking heads are non-transpeople and speak from a place of judgment, ignorance, pathologization and fear. Ultimately, *Becoming Ayden* participates in the pathologization and medicalization of transpeople. It exploits the life of a trans youth for the sake of education. The theme of exploitation and pathologization is furthered in *Girl Inside* and *Middle Sexes* because the focus is almost entirely on the medical aspects of being trans. Explicit shots of surgery are depicted in *Becoming Chaz* and *Girl Inside* whereby these shots pathologize the trans subject. Certainly, surgery and hormone shots are a necessity for a majority of transpeople (especially binary transpeople); however, there is an explicit thematic focus on surgery and the medical side of being trans in these films. In particular, the sensationalism of the story of these films above focuses on the shock value of violence and surgery to tell its story.

*Becoming Chaz* follows the life of transman Chaz Bono and his struggles with hormone therapy, top-surgery and his lesbian partner. The focus is on Chaz’s transition from an AFAB body to a male-body. In fact, the entire narrative is devoted to a discussion of his physiological, biological and emotional changes. There are close-up images of hormone injections, top surgery and the film employs medical professionals to “make sense” of and translate Chaz’s binary trans identity for the viewer. *Girl Inside* focuses on a transwoman’s experience that revolves around three years of her life during “gender metamorphosis (“process of becoming a girl”), which is remarkably similar in terms of the thematic motifs and methods to *Becoming Chaz*. The film employs many motifs observed in these binary trans documentaries. Unfortunately, there is an intense focus on the trans subject as merely biological and the camera invades the subject’s space and exploits her transition by using extreme close-ups.
Boy I Am aims to illustrate the experience of three transmen – Nicco, Norie and Keegan; however, it actually evolves into an examination of a variety of trans identities. Further, it strikes a “dialogue between feminist, lesbian and transmen” to “promote understanding of transgender issues for general audiences.” The film and a majority of the ones analyzed perpetuate the conflation of all trans identities in the category of transgender in line with the societal conflation of sex and gender. The filmmakers also carefully edit the subjects’ responses as some of their dialogue seems to be abruptly cut and forced into other discussions in order to fit interviews into the ‘narrative’ whereby filmmakers not only shape the film but the subjects themselves. Dean Spade, Elizabeth Cline, Judith ‘Jack’ Halberstam and Carmen Vasquez and five others act as cultural informants to shed light on theory and practice in relation to trans identity. These cultural informants are provided with titles on-screen to identify them; however, the trans subjects do not often have any titles at all. Some of these cultural informants do create a discursive space regarding trans subjectivity in terms of gender fluidity and a challenge to the binary, but this is not explored in depth. Boy I Am is an example of an interdisciplinary methodological project that challenges a homogeneous understanding of transpeople by involving a variety of cultural informants while simultaneously giving voice to trans subjects. Consequently, the film works to challenge the dominant theme of pathologization and objectification evident in the other trans documentaries. The film has problems as outlined above, but it is exemplary of Thomas Waugh’s definition of ‘committed documentaries’ (6). Waugh states that “by ‘commitment’ I mean, first, a specific ideological undertaking, a declaration of solidarity with the goal of radical sociopolitical transformation. Second, I mean a specific political positioning: activism, or intervention in the process of change itself” (6). Boy I Am embodies an activist effort to bring about social change, but “why has the myth of sweeping social change
remained attached to the documentary film both inside and outside the academy?” (Gaines 85).

I have mapped out some methodological promises and flaws in the academic involvement of trans subjects in documentary film and in my earlier work on queer methodologies (Ferguson 2013). The analysis illustrates both promising results and problems in relation to the autobiographical imperative and transgender metanarrative. Bernice L. Hausman focuses on the autobiographical imperative and states that these imperatives are:

- indicative of the establishment of an official discourse (or set of discourses) regulating transsexual self-representations, and therefore, modes of transsexual subjectivity. The autobiographical texts help institute a certain discursive hegemony within a community whose members have a substantial investment in mimicking the enunciative modality of those who have been successful in achieving sex transformation (337).

The trans documentaries have provided additional evidence for a metanarrative vis-à-vis the autobiographical imperative that is causing societal confusion based in homogeneity towards an understanding of trans diversity. These documentaries are embedded with thematic motifs carried out by their methods in order to “foster impressions of a homogeneous population” (Hausman 339). How do these trans documentaries work as a productive force of hegemonic ideologies to reaffirm the binary by reiterating a grand narrative? The narratives work to disseminate a monolithic notion of trans embodiment not only to non-transpeople but to transpeople in order to work power relations implicitly into
messages of diversity. Hausman states that “the official autobiography of the transsexual subject is part of the ‘true story’ of transsexualism; without these texts we would not have the phenomenon that we have today” (358). Consequently, it is important to consider non-binary representations in popular culture, particularly fiction and non-fiction film, that disrupt this singular notion of trans subjectivity.

\[^{30}\] I do not want to challenge transpeople who should be able to identify within the binary. However, my point here makes clear that these motifs work to cement and stabilize a homogeneous understanding of transpeople that props up the binary’s rational foundation based in culture.
Chapter Five

Recoding Gender Beyond Man and Woman: Non-Binary Imaginings in Popular Culture, Fiction and Non-Fiction Film

This chapter will begin to articulate an emergence of non-binary transgender discourse in mainstream media, particularly fiction and non-fiction film following the format of the prior chapter. In Chapter Four, I have demonstrated at length how the discourse around and apropos transpeople is focused on a Transgender Metanarrative that opens up a space of recognition for some transpeople while excluding those of us who do not identify within the binary of sex and gender. However, there is a competing discourse beginning to emerge, especially in the newer generations that both engages with and disrupts the homogeneity of the transgender metanarrative. I will first evidence the rise of this disruptive non-binary discourse in the area of language and pop culture and than point towards specific deconstructions and representations in both mainstream and independent fiction and non-fiction film. Then I will formulate a theory of non-binary genders and hybrid trans subjectivities by engaging with Butlerian theory of language and queer theory in relation to gender not sexuality (as traditionally employed) to act as a foundational lens to analyze the filmic texts. The film analysis will work to challenge the primary thematic motifs articulated in Chapter Four’s examination of film texts, but it will also suggest new representational modes of trans subjectivity, particularly related to Munoz’s concept of disidentification. This film analysis that aims to elevate a new trans cinema free from the constraints of the binary presents some theoretical foundation for the sixth chapter of my dissertation where I explore, in an unconventional and queer methodological way, hybrid and non-binary gender identity and subjectivity to move forward towards an active demand for societal recognition.
A Counter Transgender Metanarrative Pop Cultural Emergence of Non-Binary

Discourse & Language

The Transgender Metanarrative articulated in previous chapters of this dissertation cements a mainstream understanding of transpeople constrained by both a conflation of sex, gender (gender identity and gender expression) and the binary. However, this chapter seeks to explore a counter-discourse slowly emerging in popular culture that disrupts the homogeneity and exclusionary pillars of the transgender metanarrative. If the Transgender Metanarrative only seeks to raise the societal recognition of transwomen and transmen then how can a competing discourse focused on non-binary genders work as a challenge to open up a space that critically deconstructs gender as we know it? First, I will examine the emergence of this counter-discourse in popular culture and then proceed to provide theory that moves this discussion forward.

A National Post article by Sarah Boesveld entitled “The end of gender? North American society may be ready for more shades in between male and female” seems to hint at the counter-discourse emerging with the proliferation of the transgender metanarrative, but fails to take into account any non-binary genders other than making a point about gender-creative and independent youth. Nevertheless, an article with this explicit title in a mainstream Canadian newspaper is at least initiating a discussion about moving beyond the binary. Sarah Marsh with The Guardian writes that “Millenials are questioning whether gender should be limited to the categories of male and female.” Notwithstanding that the author conflates gender and sex here, Marsh notes that “Millenials surveyed by Fusion agree gender isn’t limited to male and female and in a similar report by the Intelligence Group, 60% said gender lines have blurred.” Les Fabian Brathwaite with OUT.com corroborates this rise of fluidity by stating that “56% of Gen Z said that they knew someone who went by
gender-neutral pronouns.” This discussion in popular culture/the media seems to be focused on language for non-binary transpeople as this might be the first place to start in understanding that we actually exist. The Economist article entitled “Non-binary language in a binary world” suggests that “a smaller minority of people feel they belong in neither sex fully; they constitute the movement to erase the ‘binary’ gender distinction” (Robert Lane Green n.p.). Now this is not exactly accurate considering that non-binary transpeople are not typically at odds with their sex, but with the gender that is assigned to their ‘assigned’ sex body. Furthermore, non-binary transpeople do not all want to erase the gender distinction or the binary altogether because people have a right to identify within the binary if this is who they are. In my opinion, non-binary people want to introduce additional identities to be beyond the binary. This Economist article values the pronoun ‘they’ as it has been used for centuries and the author states that “those who want binary individuals to be treated like anyone else might consider the virtues of this ancient and venerable English word.” I would agree that in order to achieve societal recognition and for this public discussion in the realm of pop culture to move forward, it is important to realize that introducing a whole host of gender-neutral and/or third gender pronouns may not be as effective as focusing on one that is already known (they) in order to achieve societal recognition. In fact, these other gender-neutral pronouns include: e/ey, per, sie, ve, zie just to name a few as Wikipedia’s gender-neutral pronouns page cites fourteen ‘non-traditional pronouns’ in English (Chak n.p.).

Avinash Chak in a BBC article “Beyond ‘he’ and ‘she’: The rise of non-binary pronouns” examines the rise of gender-neutral pronouns at US universities. 31 An interesting component of this article is the discussion of the imperative to confess one’s identity through language.

31 This article unfortunately is not free of problems: it conflates sex and gender and gender identity and expression. The article defines non-binary as “a person who does not identify as ‘male’ or ‘female,’” yet this is sex not gender.
This is one of the characteristics of the transgender metanarrative, so the imperative to tell one’s gender through a pronoun deserves further attention. Administrators, professors and students alike are beginning to prefer a formal registration and/or articulation of preferred pronouns (Chak n.p.). In particular, at Harvard University, “half of the approximately 10,000 students registered in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences have specified preferred pronouns, and slightly more than 1% of those – about 50 out of 5,000 – chose pronouns other than ‘she’ or ‘he’” (Chak n.p.). Linguists Dennis Baron and Sally McConnell-Ginet believe that the singular ‘they’ has a chance of surviving whereas the introduction of other gender-neutral pronouns has been an “epic fail” (Chak n.p.). Chak also notes that the Washington Post copy editor Bill Walsh sent an email to the newsroom saying “the singular ‘they’ was sometimes permissible, and ‘also useful in references to people who identify as neither male nor female.” As mentioned earlier, Facebook recently introduced ‘they’ into their database for identification purposes and Oxford Dictionaries added the honorific ‘Mx’ in 2015 for non-binary people. In early 2016, it was announced that the American Dialect Society at their annual conference had voted that ‘they’ was the word of the year (Abadi; Steinmetz “This Pronoun” n.p.). Abadi states that “the word ‘they was selected for the considerable traction it gained in 2015 as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun.” Ben Zimmer, Chair of the American Dialect Society (with more than 300 linguists, lexicographers and grammarians in membership) and sociolinguist noted that ‘they’ was signaling “greater openness to accepting new ways of expressing [gender]…through language” to move “beyond the traditional binary” (Abadi n.p.). Consequently, ‘they’ is a pronoun that is swiftly gaining in popularity and is widely and/or prominently used, which also is a reflection of pop discourse (Steinmetz “This Pronoun” n.p.). An important question exists, though, about choosing one singular gender-neutral pronoun for all non-binary subjects considering the many non-binary
gender identities that exist. How productive is it to homogenize all non-binary transpeople into using one gender-neutral pronoun if so many non-binary genders exist? Wikipedia’s non-binary identity page cites these non-binary identities: genderless, nongender, androgynous, bigender, genderfluid, pangender, polygender, genderqueer, intergendered, othergender, agender, nonbinary femme and nonbinary butch.

Some non-binary people actually reject the importance of pronouns or at least tend to take them less seriously because normative gender does not make sense, so why focus on language’s effect on identity? For example, Julie Tarney in a Huffington Post article entitled “He, Zie or They: Gender-Specific Pronouns are Personal” discusses her relationship with her child Harry/Amber who identifies as genderqueer. Harry/Amber “consciously rejects the binary labeling of ‘man’ or ‘woman.’ So it follows that he wouldn’t care what pronouns other people use, because other people don’t affect this identity” (Tarney n.p.). Steven Petrow for the Washington Post in an article entitled “Gender-neutral pronouns: When ‘they’ doesn’t identify as either male or female” writes: “there’s a change afoot in the language to refer to gender identity.” The discussion of gender-neutral in popular culture often still rests within the binary, though, as Audra Williams explores in a National Post article entitled “Everybody in dresses: Why does gender neutral clothing always mean ‘boy’ clothes for girls?” Williams explores the necessity for gender neutral to mean ‘without any traditionally feminine signifiers” because “girl clothes are for girls. Boy clothes are for everyone.” Williams initiates this point by analyzing Ellen DeGeneres’ Gap Kids commercial which was lauded for its empowerment messages for girls: “headlines gushed that DeGeneres was ‘Ripping Apart Stereotypes’ and ‘Blowing Away Gender Roles’.” Many of the more visible non-binary transpeople on social media, for example, when one does a simple search with the hashtag nonbinary (#nonbinary) are AFAB-bodied people, so Williams’ point about the
privilege of AFAB-bodied people to act outside of their assigned gender is interesting considering that there are certainly more visible AFAB-bodied non-binary transpeople on social media than there are AMAB-bodied transpeople, which is an assumptive point to make considering that not all of these people have declared their sex. I will discuss this further in Chapter Six with my autoethnography.

One of the people leading the charge for non-binary gender(s) in popular culture is Kate Bornstein. Bornstein is featured on E’s I am Cait and articulated a counter-discourse to the Transgender Metanarrative by suggesting that living and thriving outside the gender borderlines (as a freak) is actually where some transpeople want to exist in terms of our identities. I think it is important to appreciate Bornstein’s recent perspective as a counter-discourse to the transgender metanarrative. In an interview by HuffPost Gay Voices’ JamesMichael Nichols, Bornstein opens up about being a gender non-binary individual. Bornstein states:

Trans visibility is not playing out in the mainstream. Transgender visibility is playing out wonderfully, marvelously, amazingly, mind-blowingly – but that’s maybe 20% of all trans people who believe that they’re really men or really women and this is what I have to do in order to achieve authentic identity. There are a whole lot more people who don’t do trans that way, and they’re just as invisible as ever – the same way they were invisible in the early gay rights movement, the same way they were invisible in early feminist movements (Nichols n.p.). Bornstein calls marginalized transpeople “unloved outlaws,” who are “variations on sissy men and butch women” (Nichols n.p.). So, in essence, transgender has replaced transsexual and trans has become the new umbrella term (Nichols n.p.). Bornstein states that “transgender people are men and women – real men, real women – who’ve transitioned at
some point in their lives in terms of gender. But there are lots of other kinds of trans” (Nichols n.p.). So, do non-binary transpeople have to relinquish the term transgender to binary transpeople who believe they are men or women? Why is there an effort to separate non-binary people from the term transgender? In articles and discussions, people within and without the trans community now make a point of saying ‘transgender AND gender non-conforming/non-binary people’ as if the gender has been detached from the subjectivity. This would imply a level of ideological containment whereby the disruptive powers of non-binary subjectivity have to be stripped free from any linguistic relationship with gender to exist in vernacular. Can non-binary and binary as specific descriptors be added onto transgender so that transpeople who want to make it clear that they are non-binary trans can still be recognized under the term transgender? Bornstein believes that trans vs. transgender became important when TIME magazine “said transgender has reached a tipping point. It has – trans has not” (Nichols n.p.). Furthermore, transgender “is the most respectable part of the trans world and trans community. So of course it would be the first point of contact with the mainstream. ‘They’re men and women just like everybody else!’” (Nichols n.p.). Consequently, what about those of us who are neither men nor women? The secondary point of contact with the mainstream is the impact that non-binary gender(s) and queer theory can have on static and normative sexualities, which will assist in the amelioration of understanding towards non-normative subjectivities that cannot yet be recognized.
The Convergence of Queer Theory and Feminist Theory to Embark on a Deconstruction in the Promising Realm of Plurality and Hybridity

“The book whose hieroglyphs are not traced by us is the only book that really belongs to us.”

– Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (drawing on Marcel Proust).

“Language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body, stamping it and violently shaping it.”

– Monique Wittig

The intersections between feminist theory and queer theory hold significant theoretical potential for provoking the field of transgender studies forward. First, I will retrace my steps back to the beginning and then move forward. Why is sexuality always the “’proper’ domain of queer studies”? (Richardson 20). Queer theory has typically ignored gender in favour of sexuality, but this refusal to acknowledge gender “leaves lesbians and trans people out of the theoretical equation” (Jagose 117). A rational and coherent definition of queer theory will be avoided, as is typically the case when engaging with queer theory, in order to distance thinking from the powerful force of sex and gender ideologies that abides by rational and coherent categories of thought. Queer theory’s rejection of “stable and unified gender and sexual categories” is associated with a critique of ‘identity politics’ (Richardson 22). The main criticism of queer theory is that it fails to take into account that identity categories can be used for political action (Richardson 23); however, there is a lack of queer theory that focuses on gender studies instead of sexuality. Queer theory grew out of political movements in the gay and lesbian communities (Marinucci 2010; Sullivan 2003; Turner, 2000; Wilchins 2004) and this is the historical distraction that holds queer theory back from merging with feminist theory in relation to transgender studies. Queer theory’s application to gender studies will challenge the dominant criticism of queer theory – that is,
that it fails to engender political action. Why does queer theory automatically negate political action? Why is there a binary-based logic of queer theory’s function in terms of theory versus politics? To theorize non-binary genders in association with transgender human subjects is a political action because this agitation will force a political reaction to acknowledge a ‘third-space’ for gender.\textsuperscript{32} Diane Richardson’s work on the intersections between feminist and queer theory notes how feminist studies and practices may actually support and maintain binary categories of sexuality and gender (23). She borrows from Judith Butler to suggest that queer theory being understood “as a separate domain from feminism is indicative of how deeply identified feminism is with normative, heterosexist assumptions” (Richardson 35). The reason for the split between feminist studies and queer theory is that queer has the potential to “neutralize the efficacy of lesbian and gay as an identifiable category” (Jagose 112). While queer has the potential to disturb stable lesbian and gay identities in addition to man and woman, so do non-binary trans subjectivities because new genders would challenge stable sexual-based identities. How can one identify as gay or lesbian if he/she/they are attracted to a gender that is neither a man nor a woman? Therefore, the critical point in understanding the emergence of transgender as a homogeneous and umbrella term can be clarified with the tools of queer theory to reawaken some areas of feminist theory and pedagogy from a second-wave perspective shackled by identity politics. Queer theory must be used in relation to non-binary gender to parallel the theoretical articulation of a queer for sexuality, but this time for gender. The engagement of queer theory in relation to gender would occur in terms of beginning to recognize not just

\textsuperscript{32} I use ‘third-space’ here not in an attempt to create a ‘middle ground’ that would still prop up the binary, but in order to actually theorize a third and hybrid space of plurality for an infinite array of genders that could be realistically acknowledged under a language founded in queer theory.
fluid and queer pan-sexualities, but in applying this theoretical and practical notion beyond man and woman to recognize that gender has a queer dimension, so to speak, that moves beyond the binary in a similar way that disrupts rationality and coherence to binarisms.

Identities operate in a superior/inferior dynamic whereby they work to shackle subjects into hegemonic ideologies of gender and sex oppression. Identities can be violent as they enforce and punish those who do not adhere to the laws of, in this case, gender. The call to political action in the gay and lesbian community has not had entirely positive results for those of us who exist in the margins of these communities. The need to assert oneself into the mainstream to argue for equality requires intelligible coherence to the binary. The word ‘category’ is derived from the Greek work *kategoria* meaning ‘accusation’ (Marinucci 6), so we could think of identities being enforced upon us in an accusatory way in order to halt alterity. The accusation of an identity relates to the ‘crisis of identification’ in the ever expanding acronym of LGBTTTIQQA (Marinucci 32). Marinucci states that “the ongoing need for such additions and adjustments may be an indication that the established paradigm can no longer be saved” (32). Does the continuation and evolution of this paradigm of queer identities in acronym form result in reductivism and conflation whereby all queer identities begin with binary-based gay and lesbian identities? Bornstein states that “as soon as we added Q to LGBT, we gave ourselves one hell of a conundrum. Q is one identity that is not L, G, B, or T, so we have Q and LGBT – everything that isn’t queer is straight. So, LGBT identities are now emerging as ‘straight’ identities” (Nichols n.p.). Sullivan believes that this ‘crisis of identification’ can be considered a ‘politics of difference’ (39); however, I believe that this ‘politics of difference’ is a disguise meant for us to think that we are embodying our

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33 I have probably left out some of the acronyms in this paradigm here, but it is almost impossible to incorporate all of the identifications.
diverse and queer identities when, in fact, we are still subsumed under the categories of oppression and opposition enacted vis-à-vis the binary of sex, gender and sexuality. How have these “grand queer narratives” left out difference, complexity and ambiguity? (Sullivan 40). Bornstein suggests that

Some of us are straight…it doesn’t mean that we’re heterosexual, it means that we like to live the way a whole lot of people like to live. And by the same token, it’s high time the world starts owning its queer family. The people who go out on the front lines of sexuality and gender and stretch the boundaries for all of us (Nichols).

A queer theoretical approach to merge with feminist theory (gender studies) must banish the notion of uniformity and reject umbrella terms, particularly transgender, that works to conflate rather than make visible the actual queer gendered difference.

William B. Turner’s work on queer theory raises some provocative points about queer identity as he wonders if everyone is queer (8). I have to wonder in the same argumentative vein if a majority of people, rather than a minority, are transgender? How many people actually adhere to the binary of male/masculine and female/feminine one-hundred percent of their existence? Why do we understand non-binary trans subjectivity as a minority when it seems almost impossible to adhere to the binary? What if the minorities are the majority in the sense that most of us “fail to fit precisely within a category”? (Turner 8). Laverne Cox eloquently implied this important line of thinking by claiming that “everybody is trans” (Duffy “Laverne Cox: Everybody is Trans”). Cox says “Everybody’s trans…none of us falls neatly into the gender binary model” (Duffy “Laverne Cox: Everybody is Trans”).

So, I ask: What if trans subjectivity is more normative than most think it is? What if most of us are trans instead of thinking that most of us are non-trans/cis? I will return to this thought in Chapter Six, but it does pose an interesting theoretical promise for queer theory if
applied to gender. There are no boundaries to the discussion of gender freedom in relation to identification if we were to acknowledge it as a spectrum whereby most people’s gender expression is at odds with their gender identity and/or assigned sexed body.

Turner goes on suggest that “Foucault did not know what he was doing” because “thought silently thinks” (23). Our ‘knowing’ is exactly what is binding us to static identity as we think that we know the ‘truth’ about identity, but there is no truth that can be spoken in the terms given to us by those who seek to destroy alterity. We, non-binary transpeople, are blinded by the identity categories that exist (Turner 31); therefore, these “black holes of knowledge” in the form of binaries prevent anything from escaping (Wilchins 41). Binaries allow intrusions, but these intrusions or new ideas, let us call them ‘introductions,’ are manipulated to fit within the opposition and to make sense of it more than before. “The nail that sticks out will be hammered in” (Wilchins 68). Non-binary transgender people have been nailed into this transgender category in line with the gender-based binary, which has consequently almost erased and excluded queer, fluid and hybrid genders from societal existence. However, this chapter raises the visibility of non-binary genders.

Butler’s theory about gender performativity supports an anti-voluntarism model of gender (Gender Trouble) that is similar to the Althusserian ‘always-already’ model of ideology. The gendered subject is indoctrinated into a system of oppression that erases any form of autonomy and voluntarism in relation to identity. However, I believe that gender is not always predicated upon an enforced performativity in terms of an anti-voluntary doing that comes before the deed (Butler Gender Trouble). A connection with queer theory in relation to non-binary transgender subject positions enables one to work their way out of the superior/inferior dynamic of identity oppression and obsession. In Undoing Gender, Butler discusses the human in contrast to the nonhuman whereby the human can only exist if the
nonhuman exists in order to support the binary (2004). Why does Butler operate in the binary to understand it in the first place? She seems to believe that the nonhuman is human in the sense that ‘it’ cannot be recognized ( Undoing Gender ). However, recognition requires that we break-free from this binary-based thinking, so the ‘nonhuman’ needs to be re-envisioned within the terms of humanity but from a queer theoretical perspective that enables plurality and hybridity. The violence of language discussed in Butler’s Excitable Speech enables this focus in order to move forward with a theory centered on understanding non-binary transgender subjects. Butler asks: “is our vulnerability to language a consequence of our being constituted within its terms?” ( Excitable Speech 2 ). One is forced to be constituted by legal dimensions in society. For example, I feel pain when I have to identify as a “male/man” or “female/woman” sex/gender due to both conflation and the binary. The way subjects are constituted in language is injurious, but the pain is not necessarily felt in the same way as a physical pain. This type of pain overtakes the body and mind in the form of an ideological implant that guides and controls our hybrid and fluid gendered movements in the realm of normativity. Butler states that “the injurious address may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails” ( Excitable Speech 2 ). The address not only prompts a suffering, but it tells me who I am. “One can be ‘put in one’s place’ by such speech, but such a space may be no place” ( Butler Excitable Speech 4 ). How can this ‘no place’ be uttered in language? Perhaps this can happen when one imagines an impossible scene, “that of a body that has not yet been given social definition” ( Butler Excitable Speech 5 ). Queer and feminist theory can converge to create a new form of theorizing about non-binary transgender identities that connects with political action and the material needs of marginalized non-binary transgender people in society. Butler asks: “if the political task is to show that theory is never merely theoria, in the sense of a disengaged contemplation, and to insist that it is fully political
(phronesis or even praxis) then why not simply call this operation politics, or some necessary permutation of it?” (Bodies That Matter 308). Identities are fabrications that have been created as oppressive measures to control and constrain fluid genders, so enacting political action with trans theory is a movement forward or inward to deconstruct the foundation that has been built upon an obsession with oppositions.

One needs to disidentify, perhaps with the current umbrella-based voluntary understanding of transgender, following José Esteban Muñoz’s work on the theory of disidentification (1999) in order to think beyond identity categories. Imagining non-binary transgender identities challenges the categorical accusation that bodies should be within the sex and gender binary (including the hegemonic definition of transgender) or they should not be at all (Wittig 28). The theoretical concept of “disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (Muñoz 4). The key area of survival highlights how subjects make sense of identity categories and conform to them because often subjects who exist outside of these categories will not survive. The survival strategies Muñoz discusses present possible ways to live in societies that murder and/or beat difference into normativity because these strategies begin with “internal narratives of subject formation” (4). All non-binary trans identities operate in line with discussions related to risk as trans subjects are often at a higher-risk to be victims of violent crime. Muñoz theorizes that ‘identities-in-difference’ emerge from “failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere” to “disidentify with the mass public” (7). Muñoz also explores the theme of fiction and fantasy in relation to disidentifying with the normative regimes of identity (20). Is my disidentification as a non-binary gender a fiction or is the man/woman binary the fiction?
How is this tension related to identity formation, obsession and cementation? I believe that imagination is a central component of disidentification that enables a deconstruction of the problematic binaries because one is able to reconstruct queer and trans anti-identities from the ashes of binary failures by invoking imaginative realms of exploration within safe frameworks, which I will evidence in Chapter Six. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick draws on Marcel Proust to suggest that “the book whose hieroglyphs are not traced by us is the only book that really belongs to us” (63). Therefore, our identities are not really ours after all, they do not belong to us because they have been fashioned to constrain us in ways that imagination can work to reveal and reconstruct. How does imagination in relation to the autoethnography of disidentification work to challenge the sex and gender binary?

The superior/inferior structure of identity highlights the need for emancipation from these oppressive and fictive binaries. Monique Wittig states that identity-based divisions are “abstracted and turned into concepts by their masters, and later on by the slaves when they rebel and start to struggle” (2). Wittig’s metaphor strikes at the heart of the constraint embedded in transgender identity. How do we question our own non-binary transgender identity if the difference constitutes our thought? (Wittig 2). “Language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body, stamping it and violently shaping it” (Wittig 44). Identities are not only fictive, oppressive and obsessed over, but they are also violent in terms of furthering marginalization. Non-binary transgender people are marginalized in society similarly to binary transpeople who are understood to be the majority of “transgender” people under this societal and academic definition; however, the umbrella definition further excludes and marginalizes non-binary transgender people. Thus, non-binary gendered people are effectively erased by the definition that was created to recognize them in the first place. Emancipation from both the sex and gender binary and the attempt to homogenize non-
binary transgender subjects in this opposition under the transgender umbrella requires a re-envisioning of hybrid and fluid bodies that have the power to obliterate the binary from within.

Donna Haraway’s theory of the cyborg is a critical example of this movement towards a political recognition for “language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism” (112). This theoretical understanding of the cyborg aids in the reconstruction of gender hybridity against the “one code” of the sex and gender binary and signals a potential fluid reformation of non-binary transgender identities. Jodey Castricano suggests that the cyborg “introduces into feminist debates an element of radical undecideability that undercuts any essentialist or universalist claims about the identity and the category of ‘woman’” (8). Identity is a science fiction (Castricano 10) served by science to order us into categories. “The organizing structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure” (Castricano 19). Therefore, my theory of non-binary gender related to queer theory’s promise is to objectively wreak havoc on ‘the organizing principle,’ the sex and gender binaries in order to theorize “something hybrid and altogether unknown” (Heyes 267). One can apply the theoretical promise of queer theory towards understanding how non-binary acts as an anti-identity to gender as a way of imagining new linguistic possibilities beyond the current framework, which I believe can be best explained by non-binary trans representation in cinema in the next section and in my autoethnography of disidentification in Chapter Six.
I begin where I began in this section, somewhere in the in-between, the vast middle space that has an arsenal ready to destroy polar oppositions. This theory of non-binary gender(s) employs the convergence of feminist theory and queer theory to challenge the disciplinary trend of a Transgender Metanarrative evidenced by the prior chapters. This trend is disseminating a dangerous message of homogenization and exclusion to society. Trans theory should take the place of transgender studies because the term transgender has become too difficult for even scholars to understand across disciplines. The contest over the term transgender and the divide between transgender as a theoretical practice (that ignores material and political concerns) and transsexual (that ignores theory in place of the material and political) is an iterative ploy to keep us from moving non-binary trans studies forward to call for new language and frameworks of recognition. We must invoke a “powerful heteroglossia” (Castricano 20) by reclaiming and decolonizing transgender (Stryker and Aizura) as a term that can be used for non-binary genders. This is required to shift society’s current understanding of transgender controlled by hegemonic ideologies of sex and gender based in the binary in addition to the need to confess and obsess about identity. Transgender has been swept up in gay and lesbian identity politics as a way to control queerness. How many genders actually exist? (Feinberg 101). Feinberg asks: “how can we have a discussion of how much sex and gender diversity actually exists in society, when all of the mechanisms of legal and extralegal repression render our lives invisible?” (102). I have articulated that queer theory is typically employed to study sexuality; however, queer and trans both imply ‘across,’ (Prosser 258) so it is time that these theories work together to explore non-binary transgender subjects. This exploration is supported by Stephen Whittle’s work as he suggests that “trans studies is a true linking of feminist and queer theory” (xii). This linkage between feminist and queer theory can work towards praxis-oriented research that completely
abolishes outdated feminist perspectives rooted in the second-wave to move forward towards recognition of non-binary transgender people who need to be acknowledged and accepted.\textsuperscript{34} This acknowledgement does not have to follow an identity politics that would work to constrain identity in the first place or subsume diversity by disguising it under a trendy term. Rather, this acknowledgement would open a ‘third-space’ to actualize a hybrid space of plurality for an infinite array of genders that could be realistically acknowledged in a third identity until society is ready to move beyond the binary. My practical and political aim originates from a necessity to see non-binary transgender people recognized and respected in society. Butler states that “laughter in the face of serious categories is indispensable to feminism” (\textit{Gender Trouble} xxx). We can laugh at and continue to disturb the hegemonic order of sex and gender in feminist studies, but we need to be realistic about what measures can be brought into reality within a given time. I am ready to be recognized. I am ready to disturb the frozen waters of sex and gender identity based in oppositions, so I began with my film \textit{Limina} as an agent of change to disrupt the exclusionary and homogeneous representations of trans subjects in line with the Transgender Metanarrative explored in the previous chapter. I will first briefly situate my film’s subject matter and analyze its story and mode of representation before moving onto the other fiction and non-fiction films that represent non-binary trans subjectivities in terms of identity and/or expression.

\textsuperscript{34} It is problematic to generalize about feminisms, but the evidence I have gathered suggests that certainly in mainstream (public) feminist discourse and often even in contemporary scholarly feminist discourse there remains a reliance on binary oppositions, which I am characterizing here with the short-hand term "second-wave."
New Trans Cinema: Fictional and Non-Fictional Representations of Imaginations and Disidentifications

“The Tide is Full and the Wind is With us.”

- Greta Garbo in *Queen Christina* (Rouben Mamoulian 1933)

This section will begin with my cinematic filmic text, *Limina*, that works to disrupt the Transgender Metanarrative by opening a space of cinematic recognition for transpeople beyond the binary. *Limina* is a short dramatic fiction live-action film that features a young gender-fluid protagonist named Alessandra. Alessandra prefers they/them/their gender-neutral pronouns and acts as a spirit guide to their fellow townspeople. The film’s title signifies a central metaphorical device of liminality that is a leitmotif in the diegesis. In particular, Alessandra’s gender-fluidity, the settings of the bridge, church, train station, bookstore and cemetery, the time and place of the film, and the mourning process of one of the lead characters, Maria, all represent a version of liminality – an in-between space – that strikes parallels to challenge binary-based representation. In other words, the film’s diegetic focus on places outside of binaries places the viewer in a shifting scopophilia that rarely enables comfort in terms of static and stable subjectivities, settings and moods. The film is a direct challenge to the Transgender Metanarrative because it forgoes any attempt to tell Alessandra’s story as a transperson, especially oppositional to the homogeneity of the narrative identified in previous chapters. Instead, *Limina’s* story is framed around Alessandra’s journey to help others in the fictive town. The film is effectively about Alessandra’s impact on others rather than how their trans subjectivity has impacted them. *Limina’s* narrative focuses on Alessandra’s goal of freeing a mourning woman named Maria from her mourning process as she has recently lost a young child. The film highlights the beautiful gift of a non-binary transperson and how their unique and magical position in terms
of occupying liminal gendered subjectivities enables empathic perspectives. *Limina* celebrates this gift of a non-binary transperson rather than focusing on the victimization, tragedy and hardship that often accompanies cinematic stories about transpeople. The only moment of intolerance in the film is one of ignorance and quickly remedied by Alessandra’s kind insight by telling the town’s priest when questioning Alessandra’s clothing choices (a dress in this case) that he is also wearing a dress and that comfort and truth in one’s subjectivity should be paramount to hegemonic ideologies that work to assign with assumptions. Alessandra guides others through acts of kindness and the film ends on a note of positivity and optimism both for Alessandra’s future and the future of the townspeople. The film’s stylistic choices of saturated colours, illuminated sets and spiritually engaging music lend to its focus on positivity and warmth. It could be considered to be a live-action animation because of the technical preoccupation with oversaturated colours, playful themes and bright and magical diegesis.

I will return to *Limina* in Chapter Six to discuss its production in relation to my autoethnography/biographical exploration and the film’s early public response in both positive and transphobic reactions garnered by its subject matter. But, first, I want to transition into an analysis of key non-binary filmic texts, or what I call new trans cinema, not in the sense that it is necessarily new as some of the films analyzed are older films, but in terms of these films bearing new theoretical promise for the articulation of non-binary trans subjects.

One of mainstream cinema’s first representations of non-normative gender arrived in the film *Queen Christina* (1933) with Greta Garbo’s rich and excessive portrayal of a Swedish monarch who is raised as a king to take the throne from her father who is killed in battle. A remake of this story was released in filmic form in 2015 entitled *The Girl King*. 
*Queen Christina* presents a more interesting representation of gender ambiguity than *The Girl King* because the latter is focused on the lesbian romance of Christina and Countess Ebbe Sparre rather than a focus on the gender-fluidity of Christina in *Queen Christina*. Critics have acknowledged the constraints of the Production Code in 1933 in representing queer sexuality (Halberstam *Female Masculinity* 211), so a more direct iteration of this story’s queer sexuality between Christina and the Countess was due, but *The Girl King* abandons Christina’s ambiguous gender in favour of elevating the same-sex romance. Halberstam states that in *Queen Christina*, “Garbo’s androgynous and ambiguous heroine pushes at the limits of acceptable femininity” (*Female Masculinity* 211). In Halberstam’s analysis of the film, they note that there is a stark contrast in the representation of gender with the first half representing Christina’s female masculinity and empowerment through the monarchy whereas the second half of the film focuses on femininity and womanhood (*Female Masculinity* 212). There is a certain contrast in the representation of Christina’s gender marked by equal parts of the film, but this representation of gender is more complex than a simple contrast between Christina’s masculinity versus her femininity. The film makes it clear that Christina was brought up as a boy in masculinity rituals to take the throne as the sole heir of her father. The theme of temporality in relation to subjectivity is evident in this film and best articulated by Christina when she posits this question: “must we live for the dead?” Christina connotes the constraints that tradition and the past have on the present by shackling those in the present with ideologies existing in the past. This theme of temporality in films that represent non-binary gender expression and identity is most evident in *Orlando*, which is analyzed later in this section. Both *Orlando* and *Queen Christina* also focus on the importance of close-ups of the face, often-extreme close-ups, in telling the story of gender where the body does not do the talking but the face and its micro-expressions and
gender connotations articulate their significations. One could even read these extreme-close-ups and close-ups as a representation of a genderless being where gender is rendered invisible. *Queen Christina’s* use of these close-ups arguably inspired Sally Potter’s usage of them in *Orlando*. I want to analyze dialogue in a scene with Christina, in *Queen Christina*, where the close-up and her words act as a metaphor for the desired space of liminality. A close-up shot on Christina’s face illuminated by three-point lighting falls static for the viewer to reflect on this dialogue: “snow is like a wide sea, one could go out and be lost in it and forget the world and oneself.” As Christina gazes out of the window into a sea of snow and speaks this line of dialogue, one is able to read her non-binary gender expression, with both signifiers of femininity and masculinity, parallel to the sentiment of getting lost and forgetting oneself. It is this desire to get lost and forget oneself that I believe represents Christina’s desire to exist in a liminal space unbound by the past in controlling the present. Halberstam’s perspective on the film views it as a binary between a representation of masculinity and then femininity, but this ignores the end of the film where Christina leaves her crown behind and abdicates the throne. The final shot of the film is of Christina sailing on a ship dressed in masculine attire similar to her gender expression in the first half of the film, so it would be difficult to not read this as her authentic gender expression. This authentic non-binary gender expression is also made clear in the reveal scene at the inn when the AMAB-bodied Spanish officer, whom Christina falls in love with, is made witness to the reveal of Christina’s female sexed body. The Spanish officer believed Christina to be a man based on her non-binary gender expression until Christina is forced to share a room with him at the inn and must undress to go to sleep in the same bed (due to the inn’s room restrictions). However, this undressing scene disrupts the binary trans films I illustrated that these films solidify sex with gender when the body is revealed. Christina’s reveal is layered
with multiple meanings of gender signification. Her reveal is subtle; in fact the only marker
of her female-sex is the outline of her breasts and the rest of the non-binary gender
expressive markers are still in place, which the Production Code of the time could have been
largely responsible for. Therefore, Christina can be read as both a AFAB-bodied woman and
to exhibit a non-binary gender expression that disrupts gender normativity. On the other
hand, The Girl King’s explicit focus on the body, the same-sex romance and erasure of
gender ambiguity cannot be considered a non-binary trans representation at all. The film
only represents one aspect of binary trans films where Christina is measured in front of
several people to inspect her health as part of the job of a monarch in order to assure the
public. Christina is semi-nude in these scenes, but it does signal a similarity with the socio-
medical discourse surrounding trans bodies, particularly in the binary trans films analyzed in
the previous chapter. Aside from these scenes, The Girl King’s title is a clear signification of
its take on this story: that Christina is really a girl/woman/female after all. As mentioned
above, Orlando is referencing Queen Christina not just with the casting decisions, as
Halberstam suggests (Greta Garbo was famously androgynous and so is Tilda Swinton)
(Female Masculinity 213), but in the thematic motifs that I have already raised: the fluid
temporality and the close-ups/extreme close-ups in telling the story of the trans subjectivity.

Orlando is the crystal-clear example of a non-binary trans filmic text in its
representation of the protagonist named Orlando played by Tilda Swinton. The narrative
focuses on Orlando who is commanded by Queen Elizabeth I to stay young, which is
successful as the story charts Orlando’s life through centuries in British history as they
change lovers and even sexes and genders. Some film theorists want to suggest that Orlando
is a ‘true’ woman, particularly Annie Ciecko (19; 27). However, I believe the film is
groundbreaking in its adaptation of Virginia Woolf’s gender-bending novel Orlando by
portraying a cinematic version of non-binary gender identity and expression that is embedded with pertinent theory outlined in my work thus far. Halberstam states that “Swinton captures to perfection an in-betweenness of gender, which looks more like the eradication of gender than its staging” (*Female Masculinity* 213). The film does disrupt and eradicate fictive cultural notions of gender, particularly the identities of woman and man.

Erica Hateley states that “both novel and film interrogate norms of gender and culture: they each take up issues of sex, gender and sexuality and socially constructed phenomena rather than ‘essential truths’” (105). Orlando works as a non-binary trans subject who forces those around him to question gender and in the process deconstructs it to leave nothing but a spectrum of possibilities. The film is structured temporally into segments that are organized into intertitled sections with specific dates. The film takes the audience on a journey with Orlando from DEATH in 1600, LOVE in 1610, POLITICS in 1700, SOCIETY in 1750, SEX in 1850 and finally BIRTH in present day (1992 at the time the film was released).

Orlando delivers the first line of the film: “there can be no doubt about his sex despite the feminine appearance that every young man of the time aspires to.” Orlando then looks directly into the camera (direct address) and counters the use of the “he” pronoun with “I.” This cementation of gender not only beyond the binary, but also free from conflation with sex while simultaneously evoking a sense of gender-neutrality by disrupting the use of ‘he’ with the singular ‘I’ enables a reading of non-binary trans subjectivity at the beginning of the film.  

The motif of the direct address in this film relates to a ‘looking back’ at the gaze not in countering it necessarily, but in talking back with it in reciprocity as an act of learning, in this case, beyond the binary. Orlando helps the audience understand their complex

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35 I will use the gender-neutral pronoun of they/them/their for Orlando as they do not identify as man nor woman throughout the diegesis. I wonder if Woolf would have used this pronoun if it had existed in vernacular when she wrote the novel.
subjectivity through these moments of direct address interspersed throughout the film because the narrative (what is happening) and narration (how it is communicated) (Hateley 106) can express this story in different ways. The self-reflexive aspect of the direct address focuses attention of the film’s status as an artifact “in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Hateley 105). The close-ups of Orlando’s face in the film strike a similarity with *Queen Christina*. There are shots of Orlando’s face in close-up or extreme close-up where the camera is static and Orlando does not speak any dialogue. The audience is invited to read the story on Orlando’s face. Consequently, the narrative of the film exists on multiple levels; it is in essence a fluid structure. The story is told by Orlando’s face, their diegetic dialogue, their direct address as a form of non-diegetic dialogue and in the staging of other books and stories read by Orlando or in the final scene where another film is being filmed within the diegetic space (mise-en-abyme). The multiple levels of the narrative act as a structure that defies tradition. There are a few sections in the film where Orlando’s non-binary gendered subjectivity is made most clear.

In the 1700 POLITICS section, Orlando suddenly changes from a AMAB-bodied person to a AFAB-bodied person after a long sleep. Orlando wakes up from this slumber and discovers their female-sexed body. The first shot of this sequence shows Orlando removing their wig and long hair falls out underneath the wig emphasizing femininity. Orlando then places their hands in water and a shot of their breasts is shown underneath their arms. A feminine score with chanting voices entitled “A Change of Sex” is heard over these images of Orlando’s female sexed-body reveal. The cinematography is luminous and speckles of dust hang in the air like glitter surrounding Orlando’s face and body. Then a full-body shot of Orlando is shown in the mirror where Orlando looks at themself through the mirror while the viewer is invited to the same viewpoint. Hateley calls this scene “reflected and reflective
transformation” (109). A subsequent close-up shot catches Orlando in another direct address, but this one signifies more about the fiction of the gender binary than any other in the film. Orlando says to the camera: “same person, no difference at all, just a different sex”. There is a political point to be made here about the body’s intent to tell the story about one’s gender conflated with one’s sex. Orlando disrupts this hegemonic binary-based conflation by firmly stating that they are the same person without any difference. The only difference here is sex and this is not who Orlando is at their essence of being. Orlando is still the same as they were in a male sexed-body in their gender identity and expression. Gender is not sex and this powerful scene of the film clearly signifies this via the dialogue and cinematic devices outlined. In the proceeding section, 1750 SOCIETY, Potter and Woolf initiate a discussion about the fictive quality of the identity categories of man and woman, which reveals a construction rather than anything natural or innate. The film asks: what is a woman / man by featuring a discussion by aristocrats at a society gathering where people make varied comments, opinions and ‘ridiculous’ facts about men and women that are used to homogenize identities. This discussion is furthered in 1850 SEX when Orlando and their AMAB-bodied lover Shelmerdine question what makes a real man and a real woman. Pidduck suggests that “the film’s irony arises from its constant demonstration that gender is made to matter, very, very much through absurd social convention” (187). The film also places Orlando in liminal spaces similar to *Limina*, in-between time periods, walking and running through a maze and coming out of fog and smoke. At the end of the film, Orlando is in a field with their child who is filming on a handheld camera. A song entitled “Coming” written by Sally Potter, Jimmy Somerville and David Motion begins as the audience is confronted by Orlando’s multiplicity of emotions in close-up. Orlando’s expressions suggest a range of emotions from happiness to sadness and the song perfectly parallels their non-
binary trans subjectivity. The full lyrics of the song while Orlando’s face is shown in single close-ups:

I am coming! I am coming!

I am coming through!

Coming across the divide to you

In this moment of unity

Feeling an ecstasy

To be here, to be now

At last I am free

Yes at last, at last

To be free of the past

And the future that beckons me

I am coming! I am coming!

Here I am!

Neither a woman, nor a man

We are joined, we are one

With the human face

We are joined, we are one

With the human face

I am on earth

And I am in outer space

I'm being born and I am dying

(Orlando, Sally Potter, 1992).
The song signifies a space of liminality, in-betweenness that is represented by the narrative of the film and Orlando’s subjectivity. Hateley suggests that binaries structure the film throughout: male/female, masculine/feminine, personal/historical, life/death (108). However, the film calls attention to the artifice of structure and binaries at the end with this song. These structures/binaries are merely fictive devices to tell the story, but Orlando exists outside of this structured space. The filmmaker clearly makes a point at the end of the film to say that Orlando is neither woman nor a man and that the sexed-body is a signifier of gender, but it is not the maker of gender identity or expression. Orlando is free and their crying in this scene is a catharsis that I feel often when I realize that my life is lived as I am beyond the binary.

Another non-binary gender representation is found in _Hedwig and the Angry Inch_, which is often misread as a representation of a binary transperson. _Hedwig and the Angry Inch_ is a film based on the stage musical written by John Cameron Mitchell with music and lyrics written by Stephen Trask. The musical premiered off-Broadway in NYC in 1998 and has risen in popularity over the years, particularly with Neil Patrick Harris playing the lead character on Broadway in NYC in 2014 and most recently in 2015 played by Taye Diggs. Hedwig is a genderqueer person in the stage-play and film, not a transwoman or a drag queen. Many people within and without the trans community have claimed that Hedwig is a transwoman or a drag queen, but Mitchell clarified this himself in an interview with The Star: “she’s more than a woman or a man. She’s a gender of one and that is accidentally so beautiful” (Ouzounian).36 Jordy Jones in an article entitled “Gender Without Genitals:

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36 I will use she/her pronouns for Hedwig as Mitchell is the creator of this character and uses them; however, I do wonder if he would revisit the usage of binary pronouns since the emergence of they/them gender-neutral pronouns considering that Hedwig exists outside of the binary.
Hedwig’s Six Inches” published in the *Transgender Studies Reader* is problematic in its assertion of Hedwig as a drag queen. Jones states “Mitchell, as Hedwig, is a non-transsexual gay man in drag as his fantasy of a transsexual woman” (450). What this author fails to recognize is that there are more transpeople than just transmen and transwomen and this is what Mitchell created in this story – a non-binary transperson. The fact that Jones makes an exclusive argument that there are only two options for trans representation is exactly the problem. Jones states that “transsexuality is not a fixed or closed category,” but goes on to suggest that Hedwig is a “homosexual negotiation of transsexual panic by means of the idiom of drag” (450). Why does a reading of Hedwig have to be founded on a reductive version of transgender that excludes trans subjectivity outside of the binary? Near the end of the film, Hedwig and Yitzhak (the other trans character discussed below) shift their subjectivities in a process that signifies gender-fluidity, but Jones states that this means “the trans bodies of the characters disappear, returning to the ‘natural’ sexes of the actors” (463). Yes, the sexed bodies seem to correlate with the sexed bodies of the actors in the later part of the film, but how does this change their gendered subjectivity? Jones is making an essentialist claim that the sexed body somehow solely determines gender. Jones employs transgender film theorist Kam Wi Kui to make a further problematic statement that clarifies the biological deterministic perspective on trans subjects. Kui states that “by undoing the trans visuality, the transwoman became invisible or just simply vanished, while a new gay guy reemerged on the scene” (464). This reductive reading of the film not only conflates sex, gender and sexuality but it participates in a trans exclusionary discourse that reduces the trans subject to their body and expression. Gender is more than the body and its expression. It is therefore relevant to begin the analysis of the film with this claim that Hedwig is a transwoman or a drag queen (transphobic version of a transwoman as per Jones) because it
signifies that any representation of a transperson has to fit within the binary of transgender representation or else it is somehow problematic and cannot be considered to be transgender. I read Hedwig’s representation as a disidentification with both the Transgender Metanarrative and the gender and sex binary. The “identities-in-difference” that Muñoz theorizes in his work on disidentification “emerge from a failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere” (7). This is already evident in the public’s misreading of Hedwig as a transwoman and the author’s subsequent clarification that Hedwig is indeed a non-binary trans character who exists outside of the binary. Hedwig also consistently eludes this interpellation into hegemonic ideologies within the diegesis as will be evidenced by my analysis. Hedwig’s gender(s) are unable to be contained within any type of intelligible articulation because their body, gender expression and gender identity conflict in beautiful ways that illuminate heterogeneity.

Hedwig’s botched gender confirmation surgery somewhat forced upon her by her AMAB-bodied soldier lover Sgt. Luther Robinson (Maurice Dean Wint) left an “angry inch” that appears as a gash on her body, so her sexed body is queer. Furthermore, her gender identity is in doubt as she never quite identifies as one gender over another and her gender expression signifies a continuum of gender rather than just masculinity or femininity. Hedwig’s queerness could even be considered monstrous in Margrit Shildrick’s words because it “crosses the boundaries between male and female, between human and animal)” (18). By animal, I mean to say that queer embodied genders and sexes suggest an animality as this type of non-binary subjectivity is outside of the rational, of the civilized and of the intelligible human being, so that in essence the body without terms is part animal – wild and free. The theme of liminality established earlier in this section is also signified on a connotative level in the film by suggesting that the Berlin Wall and the fall of this in-
between space of East and West Berlin is part of Hedwig’s story and subjective creation.
The film ends on a shot of Hedwig occupying this liminal space in an extreme long shot of them walking naked in darkened alley in-between buildings and light.

Another character in the film who could be considered both queer and non-binary trans is Yitzhak (Miriam Shor). Yitzhak is a AMAB-bodied character played by a AFAB-bodied actor who imagines themself as the character of Hedwig created by Hedwig adorned by wigs, make-up and dresses. So, this sense of gender-fluid play is not only signaled by the protagonist Hedwig, which is a direct break from the binary trans films analyzed in the previous chapter whereby there is typically only one trans character in the films. Hedwig’s story is featured in this film with intertitles; in fact the film is focused on telling Hedwig’s story, albeit queerly in terms of structure. Hedwig is always telling their own story, though, rather than having others tell it for her. In the ‘Origin of Love’ song, Hedwig’s non-binary gender is suggested through the lyrics. Hedwig sings that early on in our history, “there were three sexes then” and proceeds to name them: children of the sun (one that looks like two men glued back to back), children of the earth (two girls rolled up in one), children of the moon (fork shoved on a sun, part sun, part earth). Therefore, the children of the moon exist in the third non-binary space of gender that escapes constraints based on the binary. Another motif of non-binary trans films is the shock and disbelief that people generally have for non-binary transpeople’s ability to look like both men and women. Hedwig exemplifies this when Sgt. Robinson remarks after Hedwig reveals their sexed-body prior to the botched sex-change surgery: “I can’t believe that you’re not a girl.” This disbelief and fascination with the non-binary person’s indecipherable subject is a promising part of the representational politics both within and without cinema for non-binary transpeople. If this fascination and/or

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37 This song is inspired by The Aristophanes story of origin of love from Plato’s Symposium.
interest in deciphering and decoding the non-binary trans subject in order to understand them exists, then perhaps the queer and liminal quality of the trans subject in visual form can act as a deconstructive text to enable disidentification to take place on the part of the mainstream to recognize that there are those of us who exist who cannot be so easily constrained into categories.

There are two films that represent gender non-conformity, but they occupy a space of identification that remains unclear within the narrative. Albert (Glenn Close) in *Albert Nobbs* and Victoria (Julie Andrews) in *Victor/Victoria* all resist the confessional imperative in different ways of the Transgender Metanarrative in the binary trans films identified in the previous chapter. These characters also disrupt the sociomedical model of mainstream trans discourse, albeit they are all set in different time periods. Chris Straayer’s theory of the temporary transvestite suggests that the non-normative gender play of trans films employs cross-dressing as a temporary process as a way of disguise, not in the sense that these characters actually want to occupy a non-normative gender space (42). However, I want to challenge Straayer’s theory of the temporary transvestite in line with theory articulated thus far in this chapter, particularly the fluid signification of queer theory in relation to gendered subjectivity. In other words, when gender is fluid and not static, how can one assume that these characters are temporary transvestites and not really trans if they occupy a space of gender-fluidity and then shift to one of normativity? Can non-binary transpeople not exist in a fluid state from one part of the gender continuum to another and so on? Why do transpeople have to occupy the space of transness constantly and consistently in order to be recognized as trans? What if one wants to be trans inasmuch as their gender is unaligned with their sexed body one day and then express and/or identify with a more normative gendered subjectivity the next day? I believe it is exclusive and reductive to enforce a
hegemonic script on transpeople, particularly non-binary people, to mandate that a trans subj ectivity must exist at all times in order to be trans. Therefore, Victoria and Albert from these two films can be read as many different identities, but the fact remains that there is not sufficient evidence enunciated by them within the diegesis that suggests they are binary transgender.

The representation of gender non-conformity in Victor/Victoria is signified with its title to suggest that the main character embodies a form of gender hybridity by being both Victor and Victoria, not one or the other. The film is set in Paris in 1934 and features spaces with gender ambiguous characters, particularly in a club where Toddy (Robert Preston) performs. The narrative of the film follows “a struggling female soprano [who] finds work playing a male female impersonator, but it complicates her personal life” (IMDB Victor/Victoria). Many of the audience members signify gender expressions that are difficult to constrain into the binary. Victoria initiates her entry into gender non-conformity as a necessity, in Straayer’s words (44), but this necessity soon turns into a woman pretending to be a man pretending to be a woman. The binary does not work so evenly to enable one to switch from one gender to another. Victoria’s performance requires a slippage into non-binary territory and the liminal spaces that exist in-between the borderlines of man and woman. At the end of Victoria’s first performance in the film, the crowd is enraptured by her performance, but it isn’t until she removes her headdress to expose the layers of gender underneath the disguise that the audience gasps and gives her a standing ovation. The audience is shocked to believe that Victoria is actually a man impersonating a woman, but Victoria is a AFAB-bodied person expressing her gender-fluidity. Victoria does mention in the film that she prefers to exist as Victoria rather than this hybrid subject of Victor/Victoria. But, the question remains of Victoria’s comfort level and believability as gender
noncomforming in terms of her gender expression, so how can we assume that she is altogether non-trans? Does the appearance, expression and performance of Victoria as Victor/Victoria not suggest a non-binary trans subjectivity exhibited on-screen for the audience? And, does this expression not challenge the Transgender Metanarrative by failing to conform to a binary-based understanding of gender?

Albert in *Albert Nobbs* also curiously disrupts the Transgender Metanarrative in trans cinema, but in a different way by featuring a trans character who does not confess their trans subjectivity in line with the binary. This film also focuses on another trans character, Hubert Page (Janet McTeer), and both of these characters could be read as transmen considering the pervasive quality of this trans subjectivity; however, I read both Albert and Hubert against the binary. *Albert Nobbs* is set in the nineteenth century and focuses on their life working as a butler by posing as a “man.” The sociomedical model of transgender obviously did not exist at this time. Furthermore, the Transgender Metanarrative within the diegesis has no impact either, but it does for the filmmakers and they resist this in various ways. First, Albert’s story is told free from the confessional quality of identifying within an either/or space. Instead, Albert seems to find freedom in both genders or outside of them altogether. Hubert also exhibits a non-binary gender or genders rather than identifying as either/or. It could be argued that both characters are constrained by society’s rigid expectations for women in the workforce, so they need to temporarily cross-dress as a waiter for Albert and a painter for Hubert in order to exist in their respective professions. In fact, the film signifies on the level of sexuality that both Albert and Hubert are attracted to AFAB-bodied people as Albert is enamored by the AFAB-bodied maid Helen (Mia Wasikowska) and Hubert is married to AFAB-bodied wife Cathleen (Bronagh Gallagher). So, the narrative of the film denotes that both Albert and Hubert are really lesbian women disguised as men because of
both the constraints around and apropos gender and sexuality in the nineteenth century. An important scene in the film comes when Albert visits Hubert and they wear dresses and venture into public which is the first time in many years for both characters where they seem to occupy a space of gender normativity as their sexed body matches their gender expression. Albert seems freed by being in a dress as they visit the beach and Albert acts relieved by running down the beach with a joyful expression as if the shackles of gender have been removed. This is the moment of complexity in the film in terms of non-binary trans representation because Albert previously mentions in the film when asked for his real name by Hubert that it is Albert, so in effect Albert is not a woman simply because they are AFAB-bodied and enjoy being in a dress. A dress does not make a woman. Albert’s gender conflicts because they seem content with both a masculine and feminine gender expression. Albert’s gender seems to occupy a liminal space of both/neither rather than either/or. Albert does not survive the film as they meet a tragic death, but it is in this death that the theme of shock and disbelief of the ambiguous gender of these non-binary trans films is featured, which emphasizes the non-binary trans character as a deconstructive text to understand for both the diegetic characters and the audience. Dr. Holloran (Brendan Gleeson), one of the hotel’s repeat guests, administers an exam on Albert by checking their pulse and confirming their death. Dr. Holloran then starts to examine the body and notices Albert’s chest binding. He is subsequently shocked by the reveal of Albert’s breasts as if they are the sole signifier of female sex. Dr. Holloran exhibits more shock at Albert’s exposed sexed body and thus assigned gender instead of being shocked by their death. This prioritization of shock at the gender reveal rather than one’s death signifies that Albert’s gender went beyond established borderlines and existed in a liminal space of un-intelligibility. The death of “perception” in terms of who Albert truly was in the entire film is eradicated by this reveal of biology as the
sole signifier of gender, but it is complicated as the story does not attempt to cement clearly Albert’s sex and gender.

The themes of these non-binary trans representations disrupt the Transgender Metanarrative of binary trans films identified in the previous chapters. The liminal, ambiguous and indecipherable quality of the genders of these characters is a break from the confessional imperative of telling one’s story in line with a linear transition from one gender to another. The theme of gender-fluidity rather than static subjectivity is also exhibited in these films whereby the characters occupy multiple and/or shifting gender positions rather than a static one that is expressed superficially through a transition denoting movement but always based on the binary. The thematic preoccupation with unintelligible forms of gender in these films challenge the attempt to pervade mainstream discourse with popular culture messages of trans adherence to the binary. Therefore, these films suggest a third-space of identification and expression that features non-binary representation. These non-binary fiction films emphasize liminality, self-reflexivity, non-traditional narrative structure, a shifting and fluid temporality and spatiality (similar to the traveling theme identified in binary trans films), and a ‘talking back/with’ or ‘looking at’ the gaze. I am suggesting here that non-binary gendered subjectivity extends to both identity and expression. Typically, one is only trans if they identify as such, but theoretically one is trans if their sex and gender do not align according to societal expectations. Thus, one can be trans if they express their gender beyond the binary. I want to again call attention to Laverne Cox’s controversial statement that “everybody is trans.” These films analyzed in this section illuminate the wide array of non-binary gendered possibilities, so the later stages of this work will articulate thinking about a larger majority of people who are actually beyond the binary in their identification and/or expression. There are very few non-fiction filmic works that articulate
spaces of identification and expression beyond the gender binary, but three documentary films in particular, *Three to Infinity*, *Juggling Gender* and *Still Juggling* all non-binary subjects and discourses counter to the transgender metanarrative.

**Speaking in Visual Terms Beyond the Binary: Non-Binary Trans Representation in Documentary Cinema**

*Three to Infinity* is a groundbreaking non-binary trans documentary film because it fills a significant gap in the non-fiction cinematic representation of non-binary transpeople. The film has had relatively successful exhibition at festivals, but has yet to be picked up for distribution. The filmmaker features eleven non-binary transpeople who identify with various terms: genderqueer, agender and non-binary. Although the film’s focus on these non-binary transpeople is in articulating their subjectivities and educating through their stories and knowledge, the filmmaker conflates sex and gender in the first few minutes. This conflation is also re-articulated by the participations, which signifies a potential problem whereby the filmmaker’s perspective is being fed to the participants. Of course, the conflation of sex and gender is widely accepted, so perhaps the participants are not being influenced by the filmmaker’s perspective identified by a diagram early in the film with gender boxes: male/female. This is an early problem of the film that confuses much of the information shared by both participants and the filmmaker. In fact, one of the participants, Jesse Pikorz says that biology does not equal gender, so why does the filmmaker conflate them? The filmmaker’s voice and identity is completely absent/invisible and this is both a benefit to enable the participants to speak for themselves, but it also renders unclear how the filmmaker’s identity relates to the subject matter and how much manipulation the filmmaker conducted in suturing the interviews and content. Most of the interviewed subjects also reside in California, which somewhat reduces the various experiences, stories and responses
that they give to the filmmaker as California is arguably more progressive towards transpeople, particularly in some of the urban areas like San Francisco and Los Angeles. A song by Joe Stevens pervades the film entitled “Gender Free,” with lyrics that emphasize “rocking the middle.” However, it is the focus on the interviews with a wide and beautiful variety of non-binary transpeople that makes this film groundbreaking. The emphasis on allowing non-binary people to tell their stories, experiences and to share knowledge directly counters the thematic motifs outlined in the previous chapter on binary trans documentaries. Some of the participants featured in this documentary are: Micah Levy who identifies as a gender not male or female, Vera Sepulveda who once identified as a dandy MTF and then a transperson, Jesse Pikorz who is genderqueer and femme masculine, Char Crawford who identifies as agender, Sasha Fleischman who identifies as agender, Lux Crawford who identifies as gender-neutral, Johnnie Pratt who is, in their words, a “closet genderqueer person” and Marilyn Roxie who identifies as genderqueer. There are some self-identified binary transpeople included in this film, such as Bertie Bouchard a transwoman and Aiden Key a transman. The film’s dramatic focus is on one of the participants: Sasha, who was badly burned in a transphobic attack on a bus. The news story went viral in 2013 and the documentary enables Sasha to tell their story in juxtaposition with some of the news stories on the attack, Sasha’s family’s responses and news reporters sharing their interest in the subject matter because it allowed them to educate the public on agender/non-binary language and identity. One of the news reports states that “the dress made him a target” and the reporters mainly use he/his pronouns instead of Sasha’s preferred pronouns of they/them. Of interest here is the news reporter’s hierarchization of the interest of the non-normative gender of Sasha rather than the horrific attack that took place. Sasha received second and third degree burns from this transphobic attack that set their skirt on fire and resulted in a
surgery to repair the burns. Sasha’s family is supportive and loving and this disrupts the typical disgust and confusion shared by family members in the binary trans documentaries.
Furthermore, all of the family members featured in this documentary related to the non-binary participants are positive, appreciative and loving of their trans family members. Another participant in the documentary, Micah, makes some points about pronouns and sensationalist trans stories that aids in the breaking free from the binary trans representation evident in binary trans documentaries. Micah says that mam/sir are both wrong and people use both in relation to them, but they prefer both to be used rather than one or the other because this way is more correct. Micah criticizes the sensationalist stories that pervade the media vis-à-vis the Transgender Metanarrative that emphasize a transperson who used to be “name” and is now “name.” *Three to Infinity* does participate in the reveal of trans bodies as a way to tell their story in a similar way to the binary trans documentaries, but this scene embodies complexity in relation to a variety of bodies and identities. Shots of bare-chested transpeople showing and discussing their top surgery is highlighted by a polyvocal quality that emphasizes a diversity of experiences, subjectivities and identities rather than a homogeneous version of being a transman or a non-binary person. This is a welcome and inclusive step forward to recognize that bodies do not always determine gender for all transpeople. The film also articulates the intersectional differences that trans people of colour face in contrast to white transpeople. A third way through the film, the filmmaker asks in title overlay: “Where are the people of colour? Or is being genderqueer a white thing?”. The filmmaker then features a black transperson named Johnnie who identifies as a transman. Johnnie articulates the difficulty and the risk associated with the intersectionality of being both a person of colour and attempting to disturb the gender binary. Johnnie suggests that the privilege white transpeople are afforded by their race enables them to more freely disturb the gender binary in contrast to trans people of colour: “it’s enough that I’m a black trans man.” However, Johnnie also emphasizes a desire to come out as a genderqueer
person. They say “I consider myself as a male, but I live as a woman.” Johnnie mentions that being black adds a complexity, but that Johnnie is a “closet genderqueer person.” The intersectional pressure of being both a person of colour and non-binary is a critical line of inquiry that deserves additional analysis and representation. In fact, the majority of the trans characters and people discussed in the non-binary part of this dissertation are caucasian.

The film also focuses on the generational differences of transpeople and how the edifice of the gender binary seems to be crumbling in the millennial and younger generations. The film inquires about the lack of older and middle-aged non-binary people and if this is generational thing. This section features Zander Keig and Aidan Key who identify as transmen, but express similar desires to Johnnie but from an age-based perspective on gender constraint. These participants articulate that it is too complex and a lot of work to constantly challenge the binary. There is safety, solace and peace in choosing one or the other because it is easier. Aidan mentions that it is courageous to identify as genderqueer/non-binary and Zander says that he was not strong enough to remain in a third place. Zander was tired of the struggle and lack of safety. It is not transphobic and/or judgmental to critically consider that identifying within the binary as a transman or transwoman is more safe, less risky and easier than existing in a third place without lack of recognition and constant subjective disruption in challenging the very identities of man and woman. Some of the inability to move forward towards a place of recognizing non-binary gender(s) stems from an older generation of transpeople who identify within the binary. This becomes evident in the filmmaker’s oldest participant, Bertie. Bertie wants people to resolve gender dissonance and thinks it is important that a transperson chooses one or the other. Bertie is uncomfortable with transpeople who exist outside of the binary, but does acknowledge that she is trying to accept a third gender where people want to be none of the
above. Bertie admits that there is a lack of education about non-binary transpeople, which seems to support the documentary’s objective in elevating awareness for non-binary people. The film also features Facebook’s decision to add 56 custom genders for identification purposes on its site. The Senior Engineer interviewed at Facebook asks: “What would you do if you weren’t afraid?” This is an important critical question to consider since many of the binary transpeople included in this film articulate safety in relation to disrupting the binary. Three to Infinity ends with Sasha attending a ball in a gown and a pride parade. Lux’s Mother at the pride parade states that “we are not sure who anyone is anymore” when discussing her work’s adoption of gender-neutral pronouns and the turn to allowing people to self-identify rather than policing gender. The documentary sets up a space of cultural evolution as non-binary is new for LGBT and the rest of society.

Juggling Gender is another example of a non-binary trans documentary film, but this one solely focuses on a lesbian performer, Jennifer Miller, who lives her life with a full beard. Miller identifies as a woman, but her full beard invites an explicit discussion about the fluidity of gender and a gender spectrum of expression. The short documentary’s opening shots feature AFAB-bodied people with their shirts off, including Miller, which creates a juxtaposition between her breasts and her beard. The filmmaker, Gold, uses Miller’s story to question feminism and the category of woman altogether. In a voice-over, Gold asks: “what is a woman?” So, it is important to clarify that a non-binary representation can take the form of both or either gender identity and gender expression. Although Miller identifies as a woman, she expresses a non-binary gender that is not constrained by rigid characteristics of femininity and masculinity. Can a self-identified AFAB-bodied woman be feminine with a beard? Why does facial hair challenge the borders of femininity? Why does facial hair denote masculinity? Miller states in Juggling Gender “if a woman has a beard, then she is
breaking a rigid gender defining line. It is treading on male territory, which is treading on male power.” Miller’s story opens up this discussion beyond binary-thinking because she notes several times throughout the film that people are often very confused by her gender, so it is this confusion – the ellipsis articulated in the introduction of this dissertation – that raises critical lines of inquiry about gendered possibilities beyond the binary. The film employs some of the same thematic motifs of binary trans documentary films, particularly explicit shots of the body (through fully naked shots of Miller bathing) and voice-over of the filmmaker; however, it breaks from these motifs by elevating the voice of the participant whereby Miller’s voice can be heard more often than the filmmaker. This method of enabling the participant to speak for themself disrupts the speaking for transpeople motif of the binary trans documentaries considering that family members, friends, partners, lovers and filmmakers most often speak for and about transpeople rather than enabling transpeople to speak for themselves. Miller identifies herself as a woman beyond how we traditionally think of women and in a cultural sense in which society creates gender, she feels something that is different than “just a woman.” Miller is a sideshow performer at a circus in Coney Island and engages with her ‘freak’ persona as the ‘bearded lady,’ but she owns and loves her gender identity and expression in this job where she can work with herself as an ‘other.’ Miller knows that people look at her regardless of whether or not she features her non-binary subjectivity in this type of job, so she has evolved into a position to integrate herself into her profession. Miller articulates a power “gained through having to live through so much shit and having to think through so many questions.” She suggests that we are all “in drag,” and this is similar to Laverne Cox’s recent statement that “everybody is trans.”

In a way, Miller’s articulation is subject to the specificity of time in the early 1990s, so Gold shot a follow-up short documentary film in 2008 entitled Still Juggling almost
fifteen years after *Juggling Gender*. *Still Juggling* is essentially a short interview with Miller that opens up on hormone question perhaps in relation to the transgender metanarrative.

Miller clarifies that her beard does not have a relationship to masculinity and that she does not take hormones. Miller states that she is transgender in the sense that she transgresses gender norms, but not in terms of identification because she identifies “pretty comfortably as a woman.”

Therefore, this line of articulation about transgender signifies a more complicated definition rather than the narrow and exclusive definition underlying the Transgender Metanarrative because it is a binary-based understanding of gender that now occupies the signification of transgender whereby non-binary and gender non-conforming are treated as a separate category – “transgender and gender non-conforming/non-binary people/folks.” As I have argued throughout, transgender has become separate from what it actually signifies – that one is quite literally across genders – and has subsumed but encapsulated the definition of transsexual. Non-binary and gender nonconformity has been split from the cognitive framework of transgender. Miller says that she could be considered as transgender not in the binary trans identification, but in relation to non-binary because she transgresses gender expression norms. Miller mentions that her beard initiates a curiosity about gender subjectivity and this curiosity has been rendered clear by the gaze apparent in many of the trans films analyzed. This curiosity is a productive part of the evolution of thought regarding trans subjectivity because it is in this curiosity that people are willing to grow and evolve their thinking and language in order to understand the space that cannot be articulated within the ellipsis, the in-between and un-intelligible space that non-binary people occupy. Furthermore, the curiosity is coupled with the disidentification strategy of subjects like Miller and the several non-binary trans participants in *Three to Infinity* who present an image
that disidentifies with logic appropriate to recognized gendered human beings. These participants simultaneously open a space of the unknown in relation to gender that disrupts this logic in a way that cannot be denied. The power of the image, whether it be in the form of moving images in the movies analyzed or in the form of stills interspersed throughout this dissertation opens up a space that trumps ignorance. One must look, curiously, and it is this curiosity by gazing at a non-binary subjectivity that fires the synapses of understanding to reboot and recode thinking about human beings that do not fit within the rational order of gender. Miller says that her circus show enabled people to deconstruct constrained notions of gender. She says that audience members attended the show expecting to objectify Miller, but were forced to engage critically with her and her subjectivity instead of participating in some form of simplistic scopophilic objectification. The curiosity begins with objectification, but the objectification leads to studying and proceeds to a need for understanding the undecipherable subject.

This section has analyzed fiction and non-fiction non-binary trans films that represent a wide range of diverse subjects who may challenge normative gender identity and/or gender expression beyond the binary of sex and gender. I want to turn to a more personal, autoethnographical (in terms of trans culture for myself) and disruptive line of thinking now in Chapter Six that will attempt to work within and without language to write about and theorize gender beyond the binary.
Chapter Six:

Recoding Gender Beyond the Binary: Reboot Thinking Based on Feminist Positionality/Autoethnography, Trauma, and Empathy

“Science is a way of talking about the universe in words that bind it to a common reality. Magic is a method of talking to the universe in words that it cannot ignore. The two are rarely compatible.” – Neil Gaiman 1993-95

I and kin emerge
To renew complexity, multiplicity, liminality
To eschew simplicity and rationality
Collecting scattered queer pieces from the sea of humankind’s tears
To swim amongst life as my own with others who are not others
Free from constraint and fear
Free in fluidity

This final chapter will imagine and articulate, both in written and visual form, non-binary gender. I will combine theory developed from previous chapters and feminist positionality in the form of stories to forge a queer methodology of autoethnography of disidentification by disseminating the writing about trans culture through personal and intimate lines of thinking. I will also reflect on the process of producing and directing Limina, which was discussed in the previous chapter, and how the film holds promise for the representation of non-binary gender in cinema. Limina received both positive and negative responses from the public before filming even began, and I will suggest that this indicates both the disruptive and productive forces of a film that deals with gender beyond the binary,
particularly for children. I will finish this chapter by describing the intention of the self-portrait images interspersed throughout the chapters. The meaning behind the method of these images summarizes crucial theory and story articulated in this chapter. The visual (images) both disrupt and work with the written to impact the reader/viewer in ways beyond what the words can enunciate.

This chapter will also experiment with language and form at times by deviating from traditional writing structure and organization. This method of disruption is, I believe, a queer methodology that puts Derrida’s theory of deconstruction into action. The theory will act as a foundation for this chapter, but the writing will follow an unfamiliar path that is embedded and embodied by who I am as the writer of this work. I will invite you in to the recesses of my memory and thought in order to share experiential knowledge of how life is for a non-binary transperson. Stories are never whole in structure; they are fragmented by the imperfection of memory and recall, so the deconstructive elements of this chapter parallel the fragmented, frenetic and wholly imperfect memories that makeup who I am as a non-binary transperson. I invite you now to once again step off the familiar path into a liminal space where binaries are unfamiliar and the queer is a reality.
The ‘Born With It’ Vs. Gender Fluidity Binary & Are Most People Trans?

“It was all very queer, but queerer things were yet to come.”

-Sunset Boulevard (Billy Wilder, 1950)

I want to again revisit Laverne Cox’s statement: “Everybody’s trans.” My theoretical formulation of the Transgender Metanarrative indicates that mainstream discourse about transpeople is preoccupied with a singular and homogeneous version of a transperson – either a transman or transwoman. I do not intend to criticize transmen or transwomen, but I have argued that this Transgender Metanarrative has effectively excluded non-binary transpeople from societal recognition. We are on the margins of both society in general, and also within the trans community. Genders beyond man and woman are difficult to imagine.

What happens once we do recognize a gender or genders beyond man and woman in society? How will this impact our static and rational ideas of sexuality and personhood? I want to postulate two important lines of thinking at this point. First, I want to suggest that, for some, gender identity and/or expression is static and occurs at birth, but, for many, gender identity and/or expression is a fluid subjectivity and one that challenges Butler’s theory of performativity. I do believe that we have control over our gender identity or else I would not have come to terms with being a gender beyond man and woman. There is an agency in the process of connecting with oneself as a transperson beyond the binary. Second, in a vein akin to Cox’s statement that “Everybody’s trans,” I argue that not only is everyone trans, but that the state of being trans is more natural and organic than not being trans. In other words, without delving too deeply into the scientific abyss of biology, gender beyond the binary is more natural than the rigid and narrow gender system of man and woman that exists in most cultures around the world. I want to suggest that the majority of culture’s version of gender in the form of man and woman is outside of the natural. Furthermore,
these fictitious categories have been constructed in the realm of culture to shape the primitive and wild into the civilized. Therefore, non-binary gender is a deconstruction of the culture of gender whereby one can see that being beyond man and woman is actually more natural than identifying with one of these genders. Everybody is trans, or most people are, because the perfect alignment with sex, gender identity and gender expression according to normative expectations is queerer than not perfectly lining up with these expectations. So, why are transpeople considered the minority if the phenomenon of trans is actually more normal in society than people realize? What will it take for people to realize that the sex and gender system is more complex and personal than we believe it to be? Why is it easy for people to understand that sexuality can be without ‘labels,’ inspired by queer theory, but that sex and gender are still categories that must be upheld? I want to turn to a debate initiated by a New York Times article by Richard A. Friedman entitled “How Changeable Is Gender?” to discuss a general uneasiness both within and without the trans community regarding the suggestion that gender is actually changeable.

I believe that notions of man and woman will crumble in the wake of postmodernity and newer generations of people that are adopting ‘no labels’ or a diversity of labels and attitudes towards sex, gender and sexuality. However, some binary transpeople and families of trans kids depend upon a stable notion of gender and vehemently challenge any suggestion in the media that gender is changeable. This identity politic of stabilizing the gender binary and challenging any suggestions that gender is fluid and/or changeable for some of us is similar to some gay and lesbian people who challenge the notion that sexuality is changeable, fluid and could challenge the “born with it” trope of modern day trans and sexuality-based identities. This “born with it” trope forms a part of the exclusionary politics of the Transgender Metanarrative because it generalizes all trans experience into an ‘I was
born with it’ narrative that calls into question people who believe that they might have been born as something but changed into something else or continue to change in terms of a fluid subjectivity over a lifetime. Friedman’s article has been called transphobic, irresponsible (as he is a clinical psychiatrist) and dangerous. Examining Friedman’s article and the resulting criticism enriches the discussion thus far about the transgender metanarrative.

Friedman frames his argument by using Caitlyn Jenner as evidence, which seems to be the major flaw in his piece because Jenner is a binary transperson and his argument fails to understand that there are transpeople beyond the binary, particularly because his argument could have been strengthened if he had employed non-binary examples. It is easy to use Jenner as an example because of her high profile, but she serves as an incorrect example for Friedman’s argument. The article challenges a notion of being trans in line with the Transgender Metanarrative but uses a binary transperson like Jenner to posit his questions. Instead, Friedman should have employed non-binary examples to support his points about gender as a social construct and the spectrum of gender identity because he says that “recent neuroscience research suggests that gender identity may exist on a spectrum.” He asks: “But if gender were nothing more than a social convention, why was it necessary for Caitlyn Jenner to undergo facial surgeries, take hormones and remove her body hair?” This question illuminates the problem with Friedman’s fixating on Jenner as the evidence of his argument.

Binary transpeople ‘transition’ to bring their sexed body in line with their gender identity at birth, so it is understandable that this article was highly criticized by transpeople. Furthermore, Friedman’s article highlights extensive scientific reasoning for the phenomenon of transgender, particularly neuroscience, which would also make many transpeople and their families nervous since this implies pathology in relation to being trans. Notwithstanding these problems, Friedman asks an interesting question that I will now raise:
“I wonder, if we were a more tolerant society that welcomed all types of gender identity, what the impact might be on gender dysphoria. How many transgender individuals would feel the need to physically change gender, if they truly felt accepted with whatever gender role they chose?” It is easy to understand why many transpeople would take offense at this question because it judges binary transpeople for being the victims of the constraints of sex and gender in society rather than allowing them to exist as they are. However, I do think it is important and interesting to consider this line of thinking, because the ability to assimilate for some transpeople is a seductive part of the process of coming to ‘terms’ with being trans and one that is imperative for some based on intersectional risks of being visibly against the binary. Friedman’s article implicitly seeks to examine how the Transgender Metanarrative has presented a narrow version of trans that has the various elements of gender confirmation surgeries and bodily modifications as the top priority and how for some this does not result in a life free from depression, discontent and suicide. Friedman states that “the outcome studies suggest that gender reassignment doesn’t necessarily give everyone what they really want or make them happier.” This is a general statement that seeks to homogenize trans experience, but it raises the question: how many transpeople are being seduced into the binary due to the power of the transgender metanarrative? How many transpeople actually realize that there is a possibility to exist and identify beyond the binary? In trying to escape the normative gender binary, some parts of the trans movement have created a new binary.

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38 Of interest is Friedman’s use of a study conducted by Dr. Cecilia Dhejne and colleagues at Karolinska Institute in Sweden, which is one of the largest follow-up studies of transgender people, published in 2011. Dr. Dhejne’s study has largely been misinterpreted: scholars and transphobic extremist religious groups have used her research to suggest that gender confirmation surgery actually does more harm than good for transpeople. I will discuss Dr. Dhejne’s work later on in this chapter.

39 Thanks to Dr. Wendy Gay Pearson for illuminating this point.
Friedman’s article also addresses the flux of gender identity in children, and he says was warned by many colleagues to be cautious when examining this phenomenon for fear of reprisal from the trans community. His colleagues were correct because this section of his article was the focus of criticism. I agree with the criticism related to this part of his article because Friedman suggests that parents and doctors should allow the gender dysphoria to potentially resolve before proceeding with puberty suppression (hormone blockers) and gender confirmation surgery. However, the subtler points he makes about gender fluidity and experimentation in childhood is an important line of thinking. The Transgender Metanarrative is pervasive and there is no doubt that children feel constrained by the rigid and narrow categories of sex and gender. Friedman’s problem areas do indicate a need for caution about assuming that all children are binary transgender based on the presentation of gender dysphoria. I agree that it is important for families, doctors and the entire medical system to begin to acknowledge that children and adults can identify beyond the binary without, at the same time, calling into question and/or dismantling the need for these types of hormonal and gender confirming surgeries for some trans children/people. The criticism of Friedman’s article in Huffington Post, Think Progress and Vox focuses on, what they believe to be, his “misrepresentation of empirical research in order to raise doubts about gender-affirming medical treatment for transgender people, including transgender youth” (Carlos Maza n.p.).

Maza’s summary of criticism against The New York Times for citing Friedman’s article and others raises a problem that I want to further explore. Maza discusses other articles published by The New York Times that critically pose questions about trans women and the concept of woman in general. Maza cites Meredith Talusan, a transgender writer and advocate, who states that the New York Times “has already sparked a situation where I and
other trans women have been constantly put in the position of having to debate our humanity.” I understand the concern on the part of transwomen in response to these articles, but how have transwomen suddenly become the primary arbiters for any discussion about sex, gender identity and gender expression? When does it become problematic if transwomen are dominating the debate about trans subjectivity and gender identity?

Transwomen rely on the binary category of woman to be recognized, but is it problematic if transwomen criticize any line of thinking that would seem to challenge static gender, which disrupts their identity? How does this criticism restrict discussion about non-binary identities if any discussion beyond a stable and binary-based trans identity and its necessary framework of “being born with it” is condemned?

I agree with much of the criticism about Friedman’s article, but the subtle points about gender’s changeability and gender fluidity in children in relation to the Transgender Metanarrative deserve to be articulated. Non-binary transpeople are excluded from the dominant discourse of trans and transgender, so why does any discussion of this come across as an attack against the humanity of transwomen? Transwomen, especially transwomen of colour, are at risk for extreme forms of violence and oppression, but what about non-binary transpeople (especially non-binary transpeople of colour) who are depressed, suicidal and at risk of extreme forms of violence and oppression because they exist outside of the normative expectation of sex and gender on a daily basis? How much harm is done towards non-binary transpeople who have to work through the Transgender Metanarrative to understand themselves as existing beyond the only gendered terms available? I want to begin exploring the spectrum of emotions and feelings in relation to my own stories as a non-binary transperson, but first it is important to situate some theory that will be employed throughout the rest of this chapter.
Hybrid Disidentification: When You Look At Me Do you See a Monster or the Monstrous?

Margrit Schildrick’s research on the monstrous strikes an interesting parallel with the image of the non-binary person. I do not intend to suggest that transpeople are monsters, but that the image of the non-binary transperson could be considered to be monstrous because it questions boundaries while simultaneously signifying “the instability of the categories that ground the normative human subject” (Schildrick 9). As I posited earlier, the transperson is more natural than unnatural, and this is affirmed by Schildrick who suggests that “the monster is not outside nature” (10). Schildrick states that “the body is not a prediscursive reality, but rather a locus of production, the site of contested meaning, and as such fluid and unstable never given and fixed” (10). The monstrosity of the non-binary person exists in the liminality of the subject, the unknown and disruptive force of being beyond the normative. The stories and images in this chapter work to present and deconstruct the monstrous while acting as a practice of disidentification. Sedgwick states that disidentification:

is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recruits its workings to account for, include and empower minority identities and identifications (31).
This chapter engages with you to reboot your thinking towards a recoding process that begins to acknowledge and see gender beyond the binary. It is about empowering difference through theory, stories and images to rethink what is known. Furthermore, the acts of disidentification against the gender binary result in a form of hybridity that enables thinking about gender not as a binary between non-binary and binary but a reimagining of a space that resists homogenization. Hybridity “captures, collects and brings into play various theories of fragmentation in relation to minority identity practices” and “hybrid catches the fragmentary subject formation of people whose identities traverse different race, sexuality and gender identifications” (Sedgwick 32). To queer identity is to disidentify with frameworks of constraint. I will disidentify with the Transgender Metanarrative and gender altogether as a hybrid subject in fluid formation. My hybrid disidentification is an act of disruption that forces a discussion about living beyond the binary. It is a ‘survival strategy’ in Muñoz’s terms to locate a space whereby I can be actualized in societal terms so that the suffering resulting from having no place can be ameliorated by the arrival of a place for me to identify with on the forms that form us into either/or one or two.

Wilchins asks: “what does it cost to tell the truth?” (“What Does it Cost” 551). What does it cost a non-binary transperson to exist in a space of societal disrecognition? Wilchins says that “if your sense of self matches closely with the cultural grid of what you should mean, and you find those meanings pleasing, then the ‘truth’ doesn’t come too expensive. For the rest of us, though, it can cost a great deal” (“What Does it Cost” 551). My non-binary gender identity and expression challenges both the cultural grid of gender but also the Transgender Metanarrative that exists where I am doubly bound by cultural frameworks that impose ideologies and constraints on who I should be. Bornstein’s understanding of gender fluidity recognizes “no borders or rules of gender” and these no-rules of gender “knowingly
become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change” (Gender Outlaw 52). I want to suggest following Bornstein that non-binary gender has no rules and this no-rule aspect of being beyond the binary is an act of hybrid disidentification. This chapter requires narrative in both written and visual form to challenge the Transgender Metanarrative that dominates the current understanding of transpeople. Wittig suggests employing Socrates and Glaucon, writing that “if ultimately we are denied a new social order, which therefore can exist only in words, I will find it in myself” (45). I present myself in this chapter to share and break the silence and to liberate myself as Bornstein suggests because breaking the “culturally imposed silence” for transpeople starts with “talking with each other” (Gender Outlaw 65). Heyes states that “gender is narrative and relational rather than essential, and hence changing gender often does challenge the identity of others” (Changing Race 276). My narrative, written in this text and on/around my body is a new perspective on the relational aspect of trans identity and expression where one can relate to a disidentification founded in hybridity that disrupts both the rigid gender system and the Transgender Metanarrative. How does my queer methodology of feminist positionality and autoethnography work as a method of enriching theory?

**Queer-Trans Autoethnography: I am a Cultural Contribution**

There is no singular ‘queer method’ “in the sense that queer lives can be addressed through a plethora of methods, and all methods can be put to the task of questioning normativities” (Browne and Nash 12). Combining methods as a way of doing interdisciplinary work is a crucial component of trans studies. Autoethnography works to “‘borrow,’ ‘refashion,’ and ‘retell’ methods and theory in inventive ways” since “my experience – our experience – could be your experience…reframe your experience…politicize your experience and could motivate, mobilize you, and us to action”
(Holman Jones & Adams 196, 198). As a method that could have applications for queer perspectives and analysis, autoethnography looks to “extract meaning from experience rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived” and “recognizes that bodies are immersed in, and fixed by, texts” (Holman Jones and Adams 200, 211). How can autoethnography as a queer method work to counter the transgender metanarrative? Stories are of crucial importance to trans subjects and these narratives must be told if we are to deconstruct the transgender metanarrative. As Adams and Holman Jones state, “you tell these stories because you believe they do something in the world to create a little knowledge, a little humanity, a little room to live and move in and around the constraints and heartbreaks of culture and categories, identities and ideologies” (109). Furthermore, when one hinges “experience and analysis, ambiguity and clarity, dialogue and debate, accessibility and academic activism, just stories and high theory” (Adams and Holman Jones 109) a deconstruction of traditional methodologies can take place to represent un-intelligible subjects. The promise rests in the liminal space in-between the binaries that sustain singular and constrained disciplinary approaches to our methods. Trans and queer methodologies will work to “disrupt traditional and dominant ideas about research, particularly what research is and how research should be done” (Adams and Holman Jones 110).

It is imperative for these interdisciplinary methodologies to challenge the notion of validity in research because it often shackles innovation. Jeffrey P. Aguinaldo discusses the concept of validity in relation to qualitative research and notes that “both storytelling and the

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40 "While arguing here for the usefulness of autoethnography as a tool, I must also acknowledge its limitations. The first of these is, of course, the fact that the perspective provided through autoethnography is necessarily extremely limited. Secondly, since the perspective is all my own, I must acknowledge my positionality in relation to the questions at issue. While my perspective is useful in that I am myself a nonbinary trans person, it is potentially limited in that I am white, North American, educated, and middle-class person."
interpretation of dreams (and visions), however wild and fantastic, are considered valid sources of knowledge within many non-European (e.g. Native Canadian/American) ways of understanding the social world” (130). However, in order to appreciate these stories and “visions” in authentic ways, traditional methods need to be disturbed. In other words, a multifaceted methodological perspective will challenge traditional approaches to methods that attempt to satisfy disciplinary requirements. Halberstam’s theory of a queer methodology understands the value of numerous methodologies in order to pursue multiple forms of gender variance presented by trans subjects. They state that “a queer methodology, in a way, is a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” (Halberstam 13).

Some of these speech acts, the stories told in this section (some organized and others fragmented/deconstructed), have been difficult to tell. They are creative and academic in hybrid form because some of these stories would not be possible without the aid of academia’s clarity in understanding who I am as a transperson. I have had to imagine some of these stories from the recesses of my memory and perhaps some are fictional whereas others could be considered raw or cooked truth. Butler states that “the resignification of speech requires opening new contexts, speaking in ways that have never yet been legitimated, and hence producing legitimation in new and future forms” (Excitable Speech 41). The articulation found in both the written stories and embodied and embedded stories in the images in this chapter resignify gender and invite you to decipher meaning in new ways. I invite you to reboot and recode your thinking by invoking curiosity similar to Laura
Mulvey’s understanding of the film image’s impact: “viewer’s curiosity drives the viewer’s appetite for deciphering meaning” (Eliza Steinbock 102). Steinbock draws upon Lucas Crawford to suggest that the “mobile character of transgender bodies, in Crawford’s view, may ‘deterritorialize gender rather than settle it…to help us experiment rather than solve the problem and to take us wayward rather than directly from one point to the next’” (116). My narratives will take you wayward against the transgender metanarrative. I do not see my trans subjectivity in line with a linear journey of beginning, middle and end. How have I experienced my gender(s) and how does this look?
Early Fragments of Existing at the Margins

Here I was growing up in a middle-class, educated family in a very small town in Ontario, Canada in the 1980s and 1990s when the visibility of transpeople, not to mention non-binary people, was absent. I always knew from my early memories that I was outside of who was mostly around me – relegated to feeling more like an alien than a human. Playing games in my elementary schoolyard, I would always choose to assume the more feminine character from a fictional world at the surprise of my fellow classmates. In third grade, I developed my first crush on an AMAB-bodied student, who was in grade six. I was confused by the heteronormativity of society so I told everyone that I was actually a girl born in a boy’s body, which was the first enunciation of a trans identity, albeit in line with the binary. Of course, the only possibility that existed in my childlike mind at this time was either to be a boy, or to be a girl if I was attracted to a boy considering my male body. But I was neither and I knew this somehow because my story about being a ‘girl stuck in a boy’s body’ seemed like a lie. I knew that my gender not my sexuality would be the challenge because it was fluid not fixed. The cultural schema of binary gender colonized my queerness and I came out at the age of fourteen in this small town as a gay boy. The day prior to going to school to ‘come out’ to everyone, I decided to wear an eccentric and feminine outfit that would best represent my queerness, albeit contained in the binary script of either/or. I went to school dressed in silver duct-tape pants, silver-spray painted shoes and make-up. My parents were confused. They asked me why I needed to dress this way when coming out. I was resistant at the time and told them that I needed to express myself. However, now I know that this expression was related to my gender not my sexuality. The non-binary spirit and subjectivity wanted to express themself even though I had no idea, words or cultural script to follow. I came out as non-binary in unspoken terms at the age of fourteen, but I
verbally, lacking truth, came out as gay and identified as a boy. Not surprisingly, this complex coming out process did not yield happiness and contentment. Depression, suicidal thoughts and confusion followed, mostly related to the extreme forms of bullying and resulting hate crimes that I experienced due to homophobia and transphobia. I always wondered why I did not feel fulfilled by this coming out and I realized during my undergraduate studies in my early twenties that I had never really come out. I came out consumed by a cultural narrative around and apropos gender and sexuality based on the binary. Now I know who I am and I will share these narratives as a way of making parts of my life public to aid in the recoding of gender and the transgender metanarrative.

Private / Public Intrusive Gaze: Curiosity’s Double-Bind

Why is my life more public than people who align more closely with the binary?
Why do I have to entertain countless stares in public that act as optically induced surgical tools meant to try and dissect and study my body?
Why are my body and my subjectivity open to study when others receive the luxury of privacy?
I want to welcome these stares, the intrusive examinations focused so intently on figuring me out when I am in public.
But, they also suffocate me. I can feel and sense their confusion, their desire, their curiosity. Look at me, but do not look too deep for it penetrates and leaves fragments of external emotions, desires, longings, fear and pain that are not mine.
Presents gifted from fascination, disgust, revelation – they wound me, yet they also open a space for acknowledging the existence of people like me.
I will be this object / subject for you at this time. It is my sacrifice to open the space of hybridity and to act as an agent of disidentification.

But be aware that I am human.

**Video Games: Reasserting Control Over Subjectivity**

Press Play

Control is absent while I live my life under another’s story

I imagine an unknowable realm of identity

Constrained by society and culture

I turn to the virtual, the dimension of the imagined

I press play with a yearning for my absent control in reality

Options present themselves beyond who I am able to be

I can choose to be a human, an elf, a dwarf or an orc

I can choose my gender through markers of gender expression

I can control who I am in this virtual space where infinite stories of subjectivity exist

I can exit the world and know that it is there for me, safe, free

To comfort my lack of control and my lack of autonomy in reality

Free from discrimination, harassment and pain

I can escape into the world of Wintress, Northstar, MECHNorth, TransAmazon

I can be me and I can be anyone. 41

**The Trans Pronoun Panic: Sensitivity to Language**

I have had countless discussions with people who ask about my preferred pronouns.

These discussions are a mind-field/mine-field of danger zones fraught by the sensitivity around language in relation to what I believe is a panic that people assume about trans

41 I want to give credit here to Felicia Day who inspired me to think about the notion of control in relation to video games.
pronouns. I believe both non-trans and trans people panic about pronouns because we operate under a hegemonic linguistic framework around and apropos the binary that constrains the way we speak about one another in language. The two available pronouns that we were conditioned into learning at a very young age – he/she – are arguably the most powerful and pervasive aspects of the English language. It is impossible to refer to a person without using either he/him/his or she/her/hers. So now gender-neutral pronouns have entered vernacular for transpeople who identify against the binary or who feel more comfortable being identified within language counter to the binary of he/she. Pronouns are of vital importance to transpeople because they are one of the primary agents of autonomy that transpeople have. However, some transpeople get very angry and offended by people who either fail to use their preferred pronouns or make a mistake when referring to them, which is called misgendering a transperson (some consider this to be a transphobic action).

People making these types of pronoun-mistakes when referring to me in language do not offend me; in fact I welcome these mistakes because it enables a corrective and practical action in language when this mistake is made. I believe this sensitivity to language in terms of harm, particularly the phenomenon of trigger warnings, marginalizes people who want to learn more about transpeople. The call to action to label someone transphobic for making a mistake about a transperson’s pronoun is problematic because it fails to take into account the hegemonic order of language and its fictitious and impersonal aspects. I genuinely believe that most people making mistakes about pronouns do not mean them (though of course some transphobic people do mean to misgender transpeople) and this is the importance of the matter. The meanings behind these mistakes are generally not transphobic. We need to recode and rethink our language in order to take into account transpeople, but this does not happen by pushing away people who are not meaning to do harm by making a mistake. It
happens by being empathic and understanding that it takes time to change hegemonic systems, particularly bound by the binary. My husband still refers to me as he/him/his at times even though I have requested they/them/their pronouns for over three years. And, my family all still refer to me by he/him/his most of the time. I often correct them to enforce the pronoun that best matches who I am, but I do not reprimand them for being under a hegemonic order of language. I wonder if the sensitivity about pronouns is a different experience for non-binary transpeople as some of us shift in-between genders?

**What Becomes of Sexuality: Desiring Beyond the Binary**

An understanding of sexuality beyond the binary of heterosexual and homosexual has permeated mainstream discourse. The breakdown of static sexuality and/or identifying with sexuality based on the binary is crumbling in the wake of postmodernity. Bisexual, pansexual and saiposexual sexualities, amongst other sexual identities, have emerged and these sexual identities challenge static and binary-based sexual subjectivities. But, how does the emergence of non-binary gender identities and expressions further the notion of a fluid and non-binary sexuality? How does one identify with a static sexual identity if they are attracted to someone like me whose gender is fluid? The framework of heterosexual and homosexual depends upon the binaries of male/man and female/woman to exist, but what sort of sexualities emerge in relation to non-binary trans subjects? From my experience, my non-binary trans identity has resulted in some interesting responses about the notion of sexuality. Are we attracted to another based on their sexed body, their gender identity and/or their gender expression? Or are we attracted to someone based on all three?

I desire for masculinity

But is this desire rooted in the sexed body

Can one desire beyond the body’s internal and external morphology
Beyond what can be traced into a realm of uncertainty?

How does gender expression and identity shape sexuality?

Are we born into a fluid and non-binary sexuality?

Is it culture that cooks and solidifies our sexuality into a static state similar to gender?

Names. Who Creates the Language?

I have thought extensively about the relationship between names and subjects in formation in my never-ending process of being trans. The idea of a name to indicate gender is cemented at birth. The moment of confusion about my sexed body discussed in the introductory paragraph of this dissertation was paired with a moment of articulation for my parents in the act of a naming a child. Certainly, my name would not have been Joshua if the doctor delivering me had remained with the “It’s a girl” declaration. My parents tell me that my name would have been Kate in that instance. This makes me ponder the system of naming in relation to rather ambiguous gender markers. What makes a name signify that one is either a male or female? Of course, gender is assigned with sex at birth, so a name is both coded with sex and gender markers. So, what makes Joshua male/boy/masculine and Kate female/girl/feminine? Is it the history of a name that entails its according sex and gender? Without the history of the name Joshua (originated in the Bible) and the name Kate (long-form Katherine, with origins in the Middle Ages) would we be able to tell whether someone has been assigned a specific sex and gender within the binary by their name alone? I believe it is the history of language that colonizes the present to bind it within a knowable realm for rational reasons. In other words, the ideological system of sex and gender requires distinct and oppositional names that signify either sides of the binary deploy its mechanisms of constraint at birth. The act of naming a child is the parents’, to use Derrida’s words, “inscription, stamp, imprint” of static and intelligible identity. Naming is the parents’
contractual agreement to enable medical authority’s agency in sexing and gendering a child at birth. The parents of the child acquiesce to socio-medical authority and submit to what they are told by the doctor, or by the machines. Why couldn’t my parents name me Kate instead of Joshua even if the doctor delivering me proceeded to say “No, it’s a boy” after saying “It’s a girl.” Why did my Mother’s mind have to automatically shift from thinking of me as Kate to thinking of me as Joshua? Some binary and non-binary trans identities are often articulated through renaming rituals whereby a person names themself in contrast to the acceptance of the name that was incorrectly assigned to them at birth. I chose to keep my name “Joshua” because I believe that non-binary subjectivity can be articulated with any name as names are fictitious cultural scripts, embedded with histories, that tell us the sex and gender of a person. However, I want to queer the script of Joshua in relation to gender. My name does not mean my sex and gender. Instead, acceptance of the name given to me at birth is a disruptive choice against the grain of a wide majority of binary and non-binary transpeople. I see names as hybrid signifiers rather than as unitary. Notions of singularity are grand-narratives of deceit.

Third Hybrid Genders: What If “It” (a child at birth) Is Not One Thing?

Thinking about names as hybrid signifiers, similar to non-binary subjectivity as hybrid, raises questions about the multiplicity of self rather than static and singular notions of the self. Every thing has multiples, no ‘thing’ is singular even though the deceit embedded in the word ‘thing’ makes us believe by linguistic trickery that this ‘thing’ is only one rather than multiple. I believe that the only ‘thing’ that exists is plurality, so being considered ‘it’ at birth prior to the swift enunciation of either male/boy or female/girl is a place of plurality and multiplicity rather than of static singularity. The promise of selves beyond the binary exists in the disruptive enunciative space of the ellipsis, as discussed earlier in this
dissertation. ‘It’ is the thing that exists in the liminal realm in-between existing language to understand others and ourselves. The ‘…’ (ellipsis) is the space of hybridity that non-binary people exist in. However, it is safer to exist in the intelligible realm of gender. One has the security of a history of signifiers and can live under recognizable terms. No one questions an identity that is already established and is the ‘true’ and authentic grand narrative. So, this line of thinking leads me into an honest, as much as the recollection of my history allows, and authentic retelling of my own processes of coming to terms with being non-binary trans.

**My Exit out of the Transgender Metanarrative: Rendering Visibility**

Fighting the cultural schema of my intended path is what has caused me so much anguish and suffering. It is safer to exist within the binary. I know that most of the suffering I experienced at the hands of bullies related to my ambiguous gender not my queer sexuality. My academic path, particularly initiated in my undergraduate work at Western University under the mentorship of wise feminists led me to a trans awakening. Prior to studying at Western University, my knowledge of feminism beyond something for “women” was absent. This time of learning enabled a deconstruction of binaries that had rooted themselves in my mind and in my thinking about the world. These courageous and beautiful teachers, some who visibly disrupted the sex and gender binary, paralleled the lessons in textual form and inspired me to think in terms beyond everything I had come to know about sex, gender, sexuality, race and culture. During my graduate work at UBC, though, I realized that my research area was beginning to parallel my process of exploring my own trans subjectivity. I knew that pursuing a PhD would provide me with the necessary time and the tools to think out my complex trans identity and to finally be free within and without my own skin. I reflect on these early times, particularly in the first year of my PhD program, and I now realize that academia can be a process of multifaceted learning.
Without my academic work, I would not be my self and without academia I would not know my self.

My education has allowed me to know who I am as a transperson, but it also opens a space of critical thinking that complicates and sets me off on a path of never-ending learning about my research interests and myself. I would say that I am my most important research interest and I think that this type of feminist positionality or what can be best understood as a feminist fusing of the self as a text in uniting force with the texts that compose our areas of research enable a disruptive force against grand narratives. This feminist fusing of myself as a text in combination with my theoretical, filmic and analytical texts assist in working beyond the transgender metanarrative. The focal point of this dissertation is the Transgender Metanarrative and this priority for my work developed out of my own process of coming to fluid terms with being trans. In the early stages of my trans awakening, I was somewhat seduced by the ability to assimilate in line with the transgender metanarrative. I have to again state that my articulation of my own experience is not meant to call any transperson’s identity into question, but I believe it is important to situate a counter-narrative-of-self in contrast to the Transgender Metanarrative that upholds a linear transition of beginning – middle – ending as the cultural schema of being trans. I thought that I would need to receive HRT (hormone replacement therapy) to better feminize as a AMAB-bodied transperson and to seriously consider surgery to bring myself in line with the grand narrative of being a transperson. However, my academic research raised awareness, at a critical time, that there are more possibilities of being trans beyond the Transgender Metanarrative. How would I have known otherwise? The Transgender Metanarrative is so powerful and I thought that there was only one way of being a transperson. I knew that I was not happy as a AMAB-bodied non-transperson, so something had to change and I thought this change had to be the
one that I knew about through popular culture and personal narratives. There is also a lack of AMAB-bodied non-binary transpeople, so I was not seeing anyone like me. I wanted to fit into what was known. I realized that I did not need to embark on the same path articulated to me by the transgender metanarrative. I came to fluid terms with being my authentic self as what I believe is a third and hybrid gender. I have never been more secure with who I am. I know that I am a third gender and I know that this is the difference that has fascinated, disgusted, disrupted and confused people, including me, throughout my life so far. So, I write these short essays in this dissertation as a disruptive autoethnographical method to exist as a text that people like me, confused and perhaps misunderstood by the transgender metanarrative, to aid in the understanding that it is possible to be who you are. It is possible to be who you are as a non-binary / third gender person and we deserve to be recognized. This recognition will require visible forms of non-binary subjectivity to disrupt mainstream discourse in order to act as an agent of change. I choose to do this in written form – written with words and written visually with my body and its expressions. My filmic work with Limina enables me the opportunity to disrupt grand narratives of sex, gender and sexuality in cinema on another creative level.

The Making of Limina: Extremist Backlash Against Gender-Fluid Children

Both recognition of and respect for gender-fluid children has been increasing. Call Me Tree is a recent children’s book that doesn’t contain any gender specific pronouns. The author of the book, Maya Christina Gonzalez, states that “gender conformity is one of the leading causes of bullying and can have long lasting, even tragic consequences.” Gonzalez wrote the book because by “beginning early and sharing age appropriate books that help kids see through gender assumptions, gender creative kids can relax and trust that they are perfectly natural and valuable. And kids who are cisgender can know that they are part of a
larger picture of natural diversity. This sets the stage for more learning about diversity and inclusion as they develop and helps dismantle gender-based bullying before it begins” (JamesMichael Nichols “‘Call Me Tree’” n.p.). So, similar to Gonzalez, the goal for Limina is to make a cultural intervention by adding a positive cinematic example to the emerging discussion about gender-fluid/gender-creative/gender-nonconforming kids and parenting. Both gender-fluid/gender-creative/gender-nonconforming kids and non-trans kids will watch this film and learn about tolerance and acceptance. It will also help gender-fluid/gender-creative/gender-nonconforming kids to feel appreciated and less alone.

Recent examples of gender-fluid/gender-creative/gender-nonconforming in popular culture: Chasing Rainbows: Exploring Gender Fluid Parenting is an anthology of edited papers by scholars and parents of gender-nonconforming/gender-creative/gender-fluid kids inspired by the Baby Storm example already discussed earlier. David Burtka and Neil Patrick Harris recently wrote a foreword to a book about the importance of gender-fluid/gender-creative/gender-nonconforming parenting entitled Raising My Rainbow by Lori Duron. The Telegraph published an article by Radhika Sanghani about Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt’s child, Shiloh that eventually made headlines around the world. Shiloh prefers to be called ‘John’ and is an example of the type of gender-fluidity that occurs during childhood that may or may not develop into a trans identity. An article in the New York Times in 2012 by Ruth Padawer explored the “trend” of gender-fluid/gender-creative/gender-nonconforming kids and parenting. 42

In an article by Carrie Kilman, the author discusses a gender-fluid/gender-creative/gender-nonconforming kid in their article named Alex who is a fourth-grader in

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42 This article is problematic due to a lack of comprehensive research, but it still raises the visibility of this discussion.
Madison, Wisconsin. “Alex feels most comfortable chucking pronouns altogether. Alex’s preferred gender descriptor is gender fluid.” Kilman notes important statistics related to the experiences that gender-fluid/gender-creative/gender-nonconforming face: “a plethora of binary gender expectations in school,” which results in serious and sometimes violent ramifications. Compared to cisgender children, gender-fluid/gender-creative/gender-nonconforming kids face: increased rates of bullying, assault, depression, dropping out of school, drug abuse, self-harm, and suicide (Kilman n.p.). Therefore, I made a film that could act as a positive and visible cinematic contribution to this emerging discussion about gender-fluid children and parenting. Limina raises the importance of acceptance, appreciation and love for gender-fluid and trans youth rather than focusing on the negative and challenging aspects of identifying with and/or expressing a non-binary identity in childhood. However, my partner and I turned to the public-platform of crowdfunding to raise the film’s budget and the visibility of the project in the public eye caught the attention of an extremist Catholic religious group based in Italy and Switzerland (notorious in Europe for their anti-semitism, racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia) who responded to the film’s subject matter by initiating a petition that has over seventeen thousand signatures (CitizenGo n.p.). The petition employed transphobic rhetoric in the form of these extremist religious groups disgust at the LGBT lobby to appeal to one of our potential sources of funding – the Swiss cantons of Obwalden and Nidwalden – to not fund the film.

*Limina* thus met with resistance before production even began in October 2015. The protests are an act of censorship and violence against transgender people. My partner and I were in Switzerland investigating funding opportunities for our film when news of our film inspired this transphobic attack from an extremist religious group in Italy spearheaded by Roberto de Mattei, who has claimed that the “contagion of homosexuality”
caused the fall of the Roman Empire (Squires n.p.). Both Mattei and a Swiss Catholic website wrote attacks on *Limina* fulminating against what they call the “gender lobby” and “LGBT lobby” (Nardi n.p.). An online anonymous petition (written in German) was created in early September in Switzerland and Italy to intimidate the cantons of Obwalden and Nidwalden not to fund the film because it is a “destructive film project” (CitizenGo n.p.).

The petition appealed to Franz Enderli who is a member of the Christian Social Party (a party that prides itself on solidarity with the socially disadvantaged) and Head of Obwalden and Nidwalden’s Department of Education and Culture. We submitted formal funding applications to both cantons because my partner was born and raised in the Obwalden and Nidwalden cantons. Nardi and Roberto De Mattei’s collective contends that transgender people are mentally ill, a retrogressive and dangerous claim considering the violence and erasure members of this population face. Yet, our film’s subject matter is welcomed by many established and notable organizations in Canada and Switzerland. Canada’s oldest transgender organization states “We at Gender Mosaic wish to denounce any petition or action that seeks to block or hinder the *Limina* film project” (Ferguson and Halbedl “Right-Wing Transphobic Attack” n.p.). Gender Creative Kids Canada states: “gender identity is naturally occurring in all human being and develops in early childhood. Gender Creative Kids Canada support film productions that represents a broad range of gender identities in children and young people” (Ferguson and Halbedl “Right-Wing Transphobic Attack”).

Transgender Network Switzerland (TGNS n.p.), the Swiss organization for trans people, expressly distances itself from the content of the petition and welcomes the aims of *Limina*. TGNS president Henry Hohmann emphasizes: “Children, in particular trans* youth, have the right to live their gender. Information of parents and schools, but also the visibility of trans* children in our society is one of our key concerns” (Ferguson and Halbedl “Right-Wing
Transphobic Attack” n.p.). Dr. Cecilia Dehjne, one of the authors of the 2011 Swedish study that the petition cites states that “this petition incorrectly uses our research to attempt to prove that gender confirmation surgery increases the suicide rate for transpeople. I denounce this petition’s dangerous and misguided use of our research and this misuse is what actually could harm transpeople and by that increase the risk of suicide” (Ferguson and Halbedl “Right-Wing Transphobic Attack” n.p.). In response to the personal and professional attacks, we explained that:

Any form of artistic censorship is wrong and deserves attention, particularly when it is buttressed by narrow religious and moralizing ideologies that exclude and stigmatize groups who already face widespread social marginalization and violence on account of their unique identities. This collective’s intent to influence government-funding bodies in order to silence our film only works to validate the importance of a film like Limina. Our film highlights the role of parental support, acceptance and appreciation for trans youth and is grounded on the importance of enabling gender-freedom in children. Recent research suggests that there are broader negative impacts of rigid gender roles for both cisgender and trans kids, and we are making this film to carve out and create a cinematic space for gender-fluid children (Ferguson and Halbedl n.p.).

We received attention in the press as a result of this extremist backlash against Limina and these articles mentioned that we proceeded with the film in spite of this transphobia (Christopher; Ferguson & Halbedl “Film looks to add visibility for trans kids” n.p.; Unterschütz “Das ist ein klarer Versuch von Zensur” n.p.; Yang n.p.). I believe that the battle waged on the part of these individuals and organizations with ideologies originating from the Roman Catholic Church, arguably one of the most powerful and pervasive
patriarchal institutions in the world, to challenge Limina’s subject matter is evidence of the binary’s crumbling edifice. These extremist Catholic religious groups are scared to lose power and much of this rests on what patriarchy affords them, so Limina’s disruptive and productive representation of a gender-fluid child, someone who falls outside of the binary of sex and gender, challenges the foundations of this specific religious dogma. These groups spearheaded attacks on our film and on me as a transperson. The hateful messages directed at me and at Limina were difficult to grasp at first, but I swiftly realized a difference is being made with the film, which was evident by their tactics to censor us. These extremist religious groups see a world that is changing. The rise of what they call the ‘LGBT Lobby” and “Gender Lobby” are unhinging their mechanisms of power that are at the foundation of their attempts to colonize, indoctrinate and to amass their wealth. Visibility of marginalized peoples in art is important because the art as text stands up to these hateful ideologies rooted in religious dogma as an agent of change. Being visible beyond the binary opens me up to this type of hate and fear, but it also provides me with an opportunity to take the fear and to re-shape it into empathy building towards understanding. Limina is a work of art embedded with empathy and kindness to challenge fear, intolerance and hatred through an articulation of humanity.

I want to end this section by sharing a special story about our experience with this backlash. I received a tweet from a young person on Twitter. This young person described how their father was against our film and had signed the petition to censor it. I moved the conversation to private messages to receive additional information as I wondered why this young person was reaching out to me to tell me about their father’s decision to sign the petition. They explained that their father is in Germany and sent his child the petition against our film as this young person saw a tweet from a celebrity about our film. Furthermore, they
said that their father is Catholic, “very religious” and intolerant towards the LGBTQ community. Apparently, their father came across the petition on a religious website. I mentioned to this person, who was obviously distraught by their father’s bigotry, that the petition provides clear evidence for the importance of our film. They responded by saying that they are looking forward to the film and praised us as an inspiration. They want us to continue to spread our message of acceptance and love. Amidst the difficult process of coming to terms with an extensive amount of hate and fear directed at me and my film, here was this young person clearly coping with their own personal experience of having an intolerant father reaching out to me to show kindness and appreciation. This moment validated all of the challenging times dealing with this petition and its results. Here was a moment in reality happening where our film’s message was reaching beyond bigotry and religious dogma to a new generation who wants to move forward from fear of difference. It was a moment to validate how art can act as a cultural intervention before filming had begun and it was a moment for me to realize that one kind message can overshadow thousands of hateful and fearful ones.

**Photo Exhibit: Written on the Body, Rebooting and Recoding Gender Beyond the Binary**

Who would I be as a transperson if I wasn’t afraid? What do the stories of my life look like thus far as a transperson? How can the visual work to reboot and recode thinking about gender beyond the binary? How can a queer methodological subjective exploration represent, disrupt, deconstruct and/or reconstruct my theory of both gender and transgender metanarratives in order to present a clear picture of non-binary subjectivity?

I have interspersed images of myself throughout this dissertation as a feminist and queer methodological visual framework to reboot and recode gender beyond the binary. I
engage with the questions above in this photo exhibit work to present nine specific stories that have been part of my life as a transperson. In effect, I have put my theory into practice by engaging with my life from a place of pre-birth (gender-neutrality) to a place free from cultural constraints whereby I can call home in relation to my ‘wild’ and fluid gender(s). These nine stories present an intimate picture of my life as a non-binary transperson in experiencing the violent sex and gender system, protecting myself, rebirthed into a trans metanarrative, evolving, dying and then coming alive again to be free.

The images were all shot with a neutral background so that my body, mind, spirit and energy in relation to both my gender identity and expression could be realized as the paint on the blank canvas. I am the paint in these pictures. My purity, my confusion, my pain and sadness, my protection, my levity and sensuality, my fluidity, my spirituality, my freedom and my wild and raw gender. This exhibit breaks down into nine different stories that are outlined here:

1. **RAW**: This story is who I believe I was pre-birth without the cultural constraints of gender in line with the sexed body. These pictures represent gender-neutrality – free of gendered markers (hair and genitalia specifically). There is a multilayered canvas in this story because my body, similarly to the background, is a blank canvas for the stories to follow.

2. **BIRTH**: This story featured in the singular picture represents my enforced constraint into the order of the sex and gender binary system. I was born with an AMAB body and so my gender must be masculine. This story characterizes my life at different stages, but mostly in my early adolescence. I feel pain and a sense of disconnection with this time in my life. This story brought sadness while shooting it in the studio. I
felt a sense of urgency to escape from this story because it is the most alien to me now.

3. CHRYSALLIS: Many transpeople follow a linear transitional narrative whereby the chrysalis and cocoon stages are related to transitioning; however, my chrysalis story was about coming to terms with my non-binary subjectivity but experiencing significant pain and violence at the hands of bullies. I was tormented during my adolescence and early adulthood. The chrysalis story represented in these pictures begin with pulling at strands to shelter and protect (Image 3.1), but then these strands of self-protection are ripped to shreds by the tormentors (Image 3.2). Eventually the violence made visible marks on my body and face (Image 3.3) crystallizing the pain and sadness of this time period in my life.

4. COCOON: I view this story as a halfway point from my birth and who I am now as a non-binary transperson. The cocoon story for me is about stasis, comfort, self-protection and safety. Many transpeople, myself included, experience insurmountable pain and suffering at the hands of intolerance and hatred, so this story is one of necessity. One can feel safety in the gender binary, but I had to distance myself from the pain and suffering. I had to take a step back and find space to heal before the growth and evolution ahead.

5. REBIRTH: This story encapsulates my confusion with my gender and the metanarrative that dominates mainstream discourse. I was close to adopting a binary-transgender subjectivity, so this story is important to represent. In Image 5.1, I am laughing at myself for thinking that I could be comfortable as a binary transperson. I am not laughing at other binary transpeople, but I am embodying a satirical and false understanding of my gender in line with the binary. In Image 5.2 and 5.3, I am
beginning to connect with my sensuality as a non-binary transperson. I am comfortable with the curves, the flat chest, the femininity – the contradictions and complexities that these images represent. However, this is not the end of my journey. Rebirth occurred for me in my late twenties and an important evolution followed initiated by my academic research.

6. SWIMMING/EVOLUTION: This story happened around the age of thirty when I evolved into a place of kinetic fluidity. The fluidity explicitly denoted by water motifs in Images 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 in relation to a transcendent form of femininity sparked an evolutionary turn for me that challenged the gender order. I am literally swimming against the tides of hegemonic gender in these pictures -- swimming towards a future beyond the binary to evolve into fluidity.

7. DROWNING/DEATH: This story encapsulates important moments in my spiritual journey as a non-binary transperson. I had to connect with my spiritual self to reawaken the diverse essence of myself to rid myself of the shackles of binary sex and gender. I had to experience a death of Josh/son/brother/husband/he/him/his in my early thirties to enable the non-binary truth to rise from the ashes. The amethyst and purple motifs of these images (7.1, 7.2 and 7.3) represent my connection to a vibrational energy that allows my truth to appear at the surface with the strength of liminality – in-between life and death.

8. FREEDOM: This is who I am now. Free from the sex and gender binary. Free to be who I am as a non-binary person. Images 8.1, 8.2, 8.3 embody my authenticity. These images were the easiest and most exciting to shoot because I did not have to summon the past. I existed in the present. These images present a clear picture of a non-binary transperson.
9. WILD/RAW: I believe that we have misunderstood nature. Many people believe that queer and trans are unnatural. However, the natural world is more queer and trans than the civilized, the cultured world. The gender and sex binary exists in culture. In contrast, gender is infinite in nature. So, Images 9.1-9.5 represent who I would be if I wasn’t afraid in culture/civilized spaces. I am completely free and open in these images because they embody the truth of my subjectivity running wild into a realm beyond the rational. I am at home in nature’s diversity where I can connect with my fluidity.

My intention is to look back and with the gaze in these pictures in order to increase the visibility of non-binary people. I do not speak and/or represent all non-binary transpeople. The burden of representation is a problematic attachment to visible minorities that puts people like me in the impossible position of articulating complex codes about a wide range of people. The pictures throughout this dissertation represent one non-binary transperson. They do not claim to represent the rich and diverse communities of transpeople that exist around the world. Pictures can often be clearer than words and/or they can signify what the written word cannot move beyond, particularly in this case non-binary gender. Words constrain and limit my thought because we are at the beginning of a time when non-binary people will be recognized. It will take time for language to catch up to the reality of the visual. In Whittle’s words, I am a cultural contribution and I make this contribution with who I am in these images as an act of hybrid disidentification that disrupts the binary.

These images represent/present stories of my non-binary self that disidentify with the linear transition of the transgender metanarrative. I think about my non-binary subjectivity as a continuum of identity and expression in these stages: the raw (before being ‘cooked’ by culture), birth, chrysalis, cocoon, rebirth, drowning/swimming/evolution, death, rebirth,
freedom and the raw again where I have reasserted my agency against normative cultural frameworks to reclaim and renew myself as a transperson. My work with this photo exhibit is connected to my hybrid life as an artist and academic.

**The Shrink-Ray Gaze: STOP Assuming My/Peoples’ Sex and Gender!**

When you look at a face and not a body, what do you see?

Why do we assume and simplify everyone’s sex and gender?

Are we scared of what we do not know?

Is it the unknown quality of human beings that drives our fear?

We must understand to know. We must know.

I call it the shrink-ray gaze of gender meant to reduce the diversity and complexity of human subjectivity and identity into what is known; particularly, that someone just has to be either a female/woman/girl or male/man/boy. Sex and gender are the first characteristics of someone that we make sense of when we meet them or see them on the street/in public. In elementary school, the shrink-ray gaze attention on me was strong. My fellow classmates tried desperately to figure out my gender because my expression did not align up with my AMAB-body. So, I used to tell people on the bus and in the playground that I was better than them because I was both a boy and girl! Of course, I didn’t have language beyond saying this at the age of eight, but this defensive statement was meant as a way to counter the shrink-ray gaze intending to reduce my non-binary gender to the binary. These classmates were participating in a form of strict gender policing and they didn’t even realize it.

Recently, I experienced this type of shrink-ray gaze in adulthood in a health clinic fully aware of my non-binary identity and expression. I was sent a referral form to a

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I want to acknowledge the performance artist Boychild for inspiring ideas for this photo exhibit.
specialist from the physician’s office at this health clinic. I read the form and noticed that my Sex classification had been changed from ‘male’ to ‘female’ without my oral or written instruction or request. I sat stunned staring at the form wondering how and why either the physisicnan or someone in the office would assume that I identify as a female because I am trans. Ergo, the person who made the change used the shrink-ray of gender that we all have at our disposal (and use frequently on a daily basis) to reduce my non-binary identity to that of a binary-trans subjectivity. So, I wrote in a detailed complaint outlining the critical problem with this mistake and educating their office on the diversity of trans identity and expression. Fortunately, the health clinic was deeply apologetic and promised to incorporate new awareness and understanding in their practice; however, it made me think about the pervasive action of assuming sex and gender that we all enact.

WE MUST STOP ASSUMING.

Stop trying to reduce the most advanced species on the planet to a simple fact.

Join me in actively challenging the shrink-ray of gender.

This final chapter has worked in deconstructive and fragmentary ways to act as a hybrid disidentification with the transgender metanarrative. I have expressed sometimes personal, sometimes political lines of thinking that will most likely inspire criticism. I ask that you realize that this is a work by one non-binary transperson who has been excluded from the mainstream discourse around and apropos transpeople. My intent is to reassert non-binary trans stories and thoughts back into discourse in order to act as an agent of change towards societal recognition. My artistic works, both the photo exhibit and Limina disrupt my thesis of the Transgender Metanarrative as a visible queer methodology to reboot and recode thinking about gender beyond the binary. I ask many questions throughout this final chapter rather than just offering solutions and suggestions because it is in the questions that
one will find the answers for themself. I do not have all of the answers, but my work as a whole has hopefully worked to illuminate many of the problems currently hindering the movement forward to theorize and work towards the societal and cultural acknowledgement of non-binary people.
Chapter Seven:
CONCLUSION / BEGINNING?

I begin concluding with a hope that you are thinking in-between typical thought patterns. Liminality is the truth, the place and space in-between what we think is the truth, the reality of our lives. Grand narratives rely on binaries to articulate their rational discourses, but this dissertation asks you to think beyond these binaries and to critically deconstruct the grand narrative of trans subjectivity, which I call the transgender metanarrative. This Transgender Metanarrative works to disseminate a singular version of a transperson to society, particularly through popular culture texts. The phenomenon of transgender is undeniable, as I have explored in Chapter Two. Most people have now heard the term transgender, especially in North America. Thousands of books and journal articles and millions of newspaper and periodical stories have transgender in their titles. I have articulated the visibility of transpeople like Laverne Cox, Lana Wachowski and Caitlyn Jenner, amongst others. Caitlyn Jenner’s emergence in North American popular culture has arguably been the most important cultural moment for transpeople thus far due to her fame and visibility represented in news specials, magazines and TV shows. Many believe that people like Cox and Jenner have initiated a ‘transgender tipping point’ as *TIME* has suggested; however, my dissertation examines this as an exclusionary tipping point that only raises the visibility of binary transpeople. Therefore, I have employed strategic essentialism to make a distinction between binary and non-binary transpeople in order to reclaim some of the space of transgender for non-binary subjects. The term transgender has effectively excluded non-binary subjects from its signification considering that the term assumed the outdated term ‘transsexual.’ So, I work at length to open up a space of recognition for non-binary transpeople with a discussion of language and the important of recognizing the
differences between sex, gender, gender identity and gender expression. Legislative changes towards the recognition of non-binary transpeople are emerging around the world, albeit slowly and only in a handful of countries: Sweden, Germany, New Zealand, Australia, Nepal, Ontario, Canada (driver’s licenses) and the State of Oregon (USA).

I have combined both the written text and the visual (written) text to work in synergy as a disruptive method against the transgender metanarrative. The visual texts, written with my body, energy and spirit, in the form of the portraits interspersed throughout this dissertation further my intent to embody and embed this entire dissertation with this disruptive agent of change and disidentification towards non-binary visibility. The images are in line with Munoz’s concept of the evocative enunciation to disidentify with constraints of identity. This work is a hybrid text akin to who I am as a non-binary subject.

Chapter Three combines a variety of theory to build the foundational underpinnings of the transgender metanarrative. I examined Althusser’s ideologies, Foucault’s confession in relation to identity politics and biopower and biopolitics, Spinoza’s concept of ‘multibodies’ to suggest that the ideological and biopolitically induced Transgender Metanarrative constrains non-binary subjects. Transgender emerged as a ‘third-way’ beyond the binary, but it was swiftly consumed by binary-based frameworks and remolded ideologically and biopolitically to only represent subjects who are line with the sex and gender binary, similar to the grand narrative of gender. The cisgender and transgender binary also represents this problem whereby all areas of trans discourse operate under an either/or framework. Consequently, I argue that the Transgender Metanarrative has held non-binary subjects captive. Butler’s theory of hailing following Althusser and the notion of intelligible subjects through speech acts also assists in understanding the pervasive effects of the transgender metanarrative. In line with Butler’s thinking about gender, I revised one of her
statements to restate that the “various acts of transgender create the idea of transgender and without them there would not be transgender in a way that people understand it.” Therefore, the stories of transgender, circulated through popular culture, create the very essence of it that becomes hegemonic. The sensationalized autobiographical imperative of transpeople (as a linear transition of beginning, middle to end), often focused and fixated on by the mass media articulates the singular intelligibility of transgender as a transman or transwoman. The interpellation of trans subjectivity sediments positionality in line with the binary, which is an exclusionary discourse further marginalizing non-binary transpeople.

Chapter Four begins to put pressure on the normative understanding of the term transgender by analyzing binary trans fiction and non-fiction film. I employ Teresa De Lauretis’ theory of the technology of gender to theorize a transgender ideological cinematic apparatus that works in synergy with the Transgender Metanarrative to deploy the film image’s accessible representation, which becomes for one the real interpellation. I also engaged with Dyer and Halberstam’s theories of stereotypes to assist in the articulation of thematic motifs in these fiction and non-fiction films that work to disseminate the Transgender Metanarrative to society. Furthermore, I discuss the debate about ‘cis’/non-trans actors playing trans roles and suggest that this debate limits our understanding of gender in and around the binary by failing to take into account gender expression while simultaneously assuming that people are not trans based on visible markers. There is a lack of trans perspectives written by transpeople on trans cinema. The only text available is by John Phillips, whom I employ in Chapters Three and Four, but Phillips uses psychoanalytic film theory, which I believe to be antithetical to trans subjectivity considering that it is focused on the binary and has contributed to labeling transpeople as pathological. Trans cinema is largely overlooked in trans studies and my film analysis makes a vital contribution
to the fields of gender studies, trans studies and film studies. I argue that the binary trans films analyzed (*Boy Meets Girl, The Danish Girl, Boys Don’t Cry, Dallas Buyer’s Club, Laurence Anyways* and *Tangerine*) all represent, in various ways, four main thematic motifs that perpetuate the transgender metanarrative. First, the double vision/trans gaze is multilayered and a representation and reflection of the trans characters in line with the binary. *Tangerine* is the only binary trans film analyzed whereby the trans character actually breaks free from being a vulnerable object of the gaze by talking back to it. Second, the imperative of telling the trans story is emphasized in these films. Third, bodies as maps that visibility mark the binary transpeople vis-à-vis gender policing. The bodies of these binary trans characters are used to cement understanding through an engagement with policing their subjectivities. Fourth, the majority of these films feature traveling trans subjects on a journey from beginning to end, which parallels the linear transition of beginning-middle-end that is a dominant theme of the binary trans experience. The non-fiction films analyzed in Chapter Four (*100% Woman, Becoming Ayden, Becoming Chaz, Boy I am, Girl Inside, Middle Sexes* and *She’s A Boy I Knew*) all represent thematic motifs that I organize into a checklist of themes/methods. These themes/methods work as an example of the transgender ideological cinematic apparatus in action by disseminating a singular and often sensationalist version of being trans in line with the transgender metanarrative.

Chapter Five works in contrast to Chapter Four by analyzing the emergence of non-binary trans popular culture. I employed Butler’s theories of language and queer theory to theorize an understanding of gender beyond the binary in applying the theoretical promise of queer theory to understand non-binary as an anti-identity of hybridity. The films analyzed in this section and the theory posed in relation to queer theory and gender “wreak havoc on the organizing principle” (Castricano) of gender and the transgender metanarrative. I explored
the liminal, third/in-between, spaces of gender subjectivity in these fiction films (Limina, Queen Christina, The Girl King, Orlando, Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Albert Nobbs and Victor/Victoria). I call these films ‘new trans cinema’ not in relation to the time period released but in their disruptive representational strategies against the transgender metanarrative. These films focus on fluid temporality and spatiality, multiple levels of narration to tell stories founded in fluidity and in ways that challenge the vulnerability of the body. Instead of the body being revealed and policed in line with the binary, there is gender ambiguity in most of these films. Furthermore, the gaze is complicated whereby a multidirectional gaze is highlighted rather than one that objectifies the trans character. Some of these films represent non-binary trans identity whereas others only represent non-binary gender expression, but I have highlighted how both gender identity and gender expression can articulate trans subjectivity. I also analyzed three non-fiction non-binary trans films (Three to Infinity, Juggling Gender and Still Juggling). These films work to represent non-binary transpeople in rich and diverse ways that raise important questions about the limits and possibilities of gender identity and gender expression.

Chapter Six works as a form of queer methodology with my autoethnography of disidentification to reboot and recode thinking about gender and trans identity and expression beyond the binary. I engaged with trauma, empathy and emotion as a queer methodological perspective on autoethnography. Some of this chapter is fragmented, atypical in structure and composed of short essays to put Derrida’s theory of deconstruction into action. How is life experienced for a non-binary transperson and what does it look like? I argue that the grand narrative of being ‘born with’ an identity needs to be troubled because it leaves out people who are fluid. I also posed the question following Laverne Cox about everybody, or most people, being trans. Many people will disagree, but I believe that one can
shift their gender and that it is not so immutable for all as some binary and non-trans people would seem to suggest. I explored how gender beyond the binary is more natural than binary gender because it exists outside of culture’s cooked state. The Transgender Metanarrative has restricted trans identity and expression, so I employed a highly criticized article by Friedman to raise the possibility of gender’s changeability and how this article highlights what I believe is a censorship on the part of some binary transpeople in discussing any notion of gender that is out of line with the ‘born with it’ identity politic of binary trans subjectivity. My short essays then began with discussing the monstrous in relation to non-binary subjects and how a new social order can be found in myself as a survival strategy to present/deconstruct the monstrous. I believe that my monstrous form, as outside of culture’s cooked state, is a hybrid disidentification, so what does it cost to tell this truth about my gender with no rules? I explored the potential for queer and trans autoethnography to act as a cultural contribution vis-à-vis ‘bodies immersed in texts’ and proceeded to share counter-stories of trans subjectivity against the grain of the Transgender Metanarrative to act as valid sources of knowledge. The recesses of my memory are ideologically contaminated, fragmented histories, semi-fictional, but it is in this sharing of my stories and myself through images that a viewer’s curiosity can work to decipher meaning (Mulvey) beyond the binary. I shared memories of my early trans awareness, as I was confused early on in my life about who I was and why I could not figure myself out. There were multiple coming-outs in my life as stages of cultural confusion and expression in contrast to the singular coming out story of many transpeople. I discussed the private and public intrusive gaze and curiosity’s double bind as a complex experience that is both painful and pleasurable (in knowing that other’s are learning). The result of control found in playing video games and the trans pronoun panic are explored. In particular, I believe that mistaking preferred pronouns opens
up a space of education and empathy. Language is hegemonic and powerful and it takes time to evolve this system to adhere to specific pronouns for transpeople. I then discuss the fiction of static sexuality if one is attracted to a non-binary person and the naming of transpeople. The history of a name equals the sex and gender significations of that name and the naming of a child at birth is the parents’ contractual agreement that their child will abide by the binary system of sex and gender. I explored the plurality of the notion of a ‘thing’ and an ‘it’ by offering a competing theory that explicit singularity equals this, but I suggest that a thing and an it is always plural not singularity – nothing is only one thing. I also discussed my exit out of the Transgender Metanarrative by reflecting on academia’s gift to my own self. Without academic work, I would not know my self. I am, as a multilayered text, my most important research interest and this engagement with my self as a symbiotic process of learning enabled this work. This final chapter also discussed Limina’s extremist backlash received due to its disruptive subject matter by suggesting that the natural state for children is gender-fluidity. I provided the details behind the photo exhibit interspersed throughout this work as an engagement with the notion of who one would be if they weren’t afraid and in an effort to look back and with the gaze as a non-binary transperson. Finally, the final short essay focuses on what I call the shrink-ray gaze of gender that all of us practice on a daily basis to shrink peoples’ sexes and genders in an assumptive way in line with the binary.

There are both strengths and limits to this research because all research is limited to some degree. The theorization of a Transgender Metanarrative holds the key to see beyond a hegemonic and exclusionary practice occurring within and without the trans communities around the world. In understanding non-binary gender theory as an anti-identity of hybridity by deconstructing the oppositional distinction between binary and non-binary transpeople, new applications can be made to academic research in many fields. Also, my contribution of
the queer form of an autoethnography of disidentification begins to imagine ways to engage with non-binary gender theory as a form of deconstructive methodology and it puts pressure on Butler’s theory of gender performativity.

My research is somewhat limited in its ability to imagine language beyond binary transgender vs. non-binary transgender. I mentioned that this distinction is a form of strategic essentialism to consider a comparison between two sides of identity and expression. However, that is not to say that non-binary trans or even binary trans subjectivity is singular as I have argued above, but it could be read this way. This research has been conducted and deployed from a Western-perspective. I am a caucasian person with afforded privilege due to this subject position and I acknowledge this intersectional privilege. I also do not take into consideration the rich and diverse cultural specificities that exist worldwide in relation to sex and gender (especially gender beyond the binary). This research is a statement in time as the texts analyzed and my autoethnography is fluid.

This dissertation can be applied to the evolution of trans studies (typically called transgender studies) to extend theory about narratives in relation to subjectivity in terms of trans identities and expressions. I do not know exactly what direction this new research will take because it is impossible to see beyond the questions that currently exist. But, I do know that the visible and enunciative disruptive strategy of this work in the form of a hybrid disidentification will signal new applications for research on trans subjects, particularly non-binary subjects who embody the heart of the challenge against the constraint embedded in the systems of sex and gender.

There is only one recent academic book, published beyond the year 2000, that deals with transgender representation in cinema: John Phillips’ *Transgender On Screen*. I dealt at length with the useful applications of this book, but also the many problems evident as a text
in understanding trans representation in cinema. It is time for a comprehensive academic perspective on trans representation in cinema and popular culture considering the emergence of the transgender phenomenon. My strength is addressing this gap in academia by focusing on my thesis of the transgender metanarrative, which is employed, disseminated and also challenged by the variety of fiction and non-fiction films analyzed. This work fills a significant gap in literature on trans representation in cinema and it also bears visible a non-binary in hybrid and fluid formation by presenting myself as a text throughout the literal text. Therefore, I cannot measure the exact contribution of my work, but I hope it initiates necessary criticism, reflection, understanding and education about trans culture, trans representation in cinema and non-binary genders and subjectivities.

The start of a beginning always implies an ending as I suggested in the first line of this dissertation. I believe that there is no ending to anything. In academia and in my own experience as a non-binary transperson, beginnings exist but endings do not. We read, think about and consider questions to contribute to existing knowledge, but we never stop asking questions. I suggest we never stop questioning the ordering systems that constrain our ways of being in the world. I questioned gender and transgender as a way of finding out who I am. This questioning is a never-ending quest on a non-linear and liminal search for answers that are embedded with more questions. Curiosity and constant evolution is necessary in order to challenge the restriction of identity. Exclusionary practices in society do harm to the oppressed and it is our job in social justice to ensure that those excluded are recognized, but it is important that they are not reworked into the normative. It is time to accept postmodernity’s arrival in reality and not just in theory. Binaries are weapons that sustain wars founded on us vs. them frameworks. We have to lay down the old weapons of war and to recognize the beautiful luminosity that exists in the spectrum of reality for all of us. We
are coming and we are here.
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