



Transition as Decreation: A Transfeminist Phenomenology of Mixed/Queer Orientation

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ABSTRACT: This phenomenological autoethnographic account reflects on moments from the first five years of the author’s transition from female-to-male while attending UC Berkeley and Harvard Divinity School. Lau unpacks the affects of racialization and sexualization on his medicalized mixed race trans male body. He meditates extensively on the relationship between loss of his body’s sedimented citational history to visibility and disorientation during transition by engaging with Anne Carson’s concept of decreation, and Sara Ahmed’s work on mixed genealogies and queer orientations. By thinking through transition as decreative rather than purely generative and linear, Lau demonstrates that social and medical transition unearth nonlinear histories of sedimented acts on queer of color bodies. Lau also makes the argument for extending Ahmed’s concept of “seeing slantwise” as a queer orientation pertaining to queer sexualities and mixed race genealogies to Asian American trans identity and experience. More than a singular affect grounded in presentism (understanding the current moment as only what is “eternal” and “real”), seeing slantwise opens up mixed trans bodies to nonlinear ways of organizing and feeling out their embodied histories that does not adhere to cisnormative time.

KEYWORDS: phenomenology, Trans of Color critique, Critical Mixed Race Studies, racialized masculinities, cisnormative time.

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Decreation is an undoing of the creature in us – the creature enclosed in self and defined by self. But to undo self one must move through self, to the very inside of its definition. – Anne Carson

In her 2006 work *Queer Phenomenology* Sara Ahmed defines queer orientations as “those that put within reach bodies that are unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy. Queer orientations might be those that don’t line up, which by seeing the world ‘slantwise’ allow other objects to come into view” (2006, p. 107). While Ahmed is talking specifically about sexual orientation and same-sex desire I think that the desire to transition from the sex and gender one is assigned at birth to a different gender and/or sex would also align with a “slantwise” view of conventional genealogy. I interpret conventional genealogy as not only blood kin and family described by Ahmed, but those sets of cisnormative embodied expectations and the sexual identity categories that are based off of the assumption of one’s unchanging sex and gender. To see the world slantwise is then to feel out of alignment not only with heteronormative temporalities, and “whiteness as a straightening device,” which place blood ties at the center of the orientating table, it is also to feel out of cisnormative time within the racially and gender sedimented body (Ahmed, 2006, p. 121). What happens when the supposedly “unreachable bodies” within conventional genealogy that come into view become one’s own? What does seeing slantwise feel like and do?

In this essay, I will explore the disorienting process of feeling mixed through simultaneous becoming, decreation, and seeing slantwise that was/is my gender transition from female to male, particularly focusing on affective effects from experiences during the first five years of my transition.¹ Throughout this article I will utilize Ahmed’s concepts of dis- and re-orientation through negation, as well

as mixed genealogies and orientations. What Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* lends traditions of looking to negativity in queer studies is a mode of gender embodiment firmly shaped and located in the racialized and sexualized social field through interrelational encounters that assume whiteness and heteronormativity. When these assumptions are placed on queer and/or people of color, these bodies fall out of alignment, and demonstrate the normative limits of spaces historically steeped in whiteness and/or heterosexism (even when these spaces proclaim their investment in diversity, equality, and postracial politics). I argue that queer and trans of color bodies, and particularly bodies in transition, also demonstrate a differential and nonlinear kind of citational temporality primarily through affects that eject the body out-of-time within queer (white) spaces, the result of which is continual partial and misrecognition. Transition occurs through an affective dis- and re-orientation within the lineage of mixed genealogies and queer orientations.

Anne Carson's concept of decreation will also be an accompanying concept throughout this piece. Borrowed from the Christian mystic Simone Weil, the word decreation is, "a neologism to which [Weil] did not give an exact definition nor a consistent spelling" (Carson 2005, p. 167). Carson describes decreation as a project of "an undoing of the creature enclosed in-self and defined by self" (2005, p. 179). While Weil understood the undoing of the creature in us as a means for making way for the divine, I understand the unmaking of the creature in-self as an apt metaphor for transition (as opposed to the common cultural narrative of trans people 'becoming our true selves'). Decreation as described by Weil and interpreted and articulated by Carson centralizes the contradictions of a project of unmaking self through writing about a becoming self. This is a contradiction I am also taking up by writing about a transition in which I experienced something akin to loss through an articulation, that is much less than mastery and truth. Understanding loss in my mixed race transmasculine transition as a decreation makes space for creation and becoming; it allows for seeing slantwise. Simultaneously, the sedimentation of material history of a body is never entirely lost and if read through a trans affirmative feminist lens, this puts pressure on cisnormative assumptions of the racialized and sexualized body. In her field launching essay *The Empire Strikes Back*, Sandy Stone made the argument that posttranssexual narratives should refuse leaving behind a trans gender history for stealthy living amongst cis people, as this would never challenge the cisnormative narratives gatekeeping transpeople's

livelihoods (1987, p. 232). Instead Stone insisted on thinking transgender through new genres of narratology. She says:

transsexuals must take responsibility for *all* of their history, to begin to rearticulate their lives not as a series of erasures in the service of a species of feminism conceived from within a traditional frame, but as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body. (Stone: 1987, p. 232)

I must make clear that I am not trying to turn the pains of loss into something entirely productive, but to situate a reading of my transition as decreative act that does not disappear loss or embodied history; rather it opens the subjects to the complications and contradictions of disorientation. Making strange bedfellows between Carson's poetic literary criticism in *Decreation* and Ahmed's queering of phenomenology allows for my transition to be understood through feeling mixed and seeing slantwise as an agential undoing of my fraught relationships to sexual, and racial categories based on the assumption of sex being equivalent to gender.

Allowing for an articulation of my background, a mixed racial and gender history operating simultaneously within and outside of the presentism of everyday social interactions, dis- and re-orientation describe the interface between social, legal, medical fields and my embodied subjectivity and identities. The continual visual misalignment of my body to the sexual, racial, and class categories to which I belonged effected the extent of reach for my often secret desires and hidden identity. These readings of my body pigeonholed me into time and space that was neither queer (in regards to embodiment) nor mixed. The temporal concept of presentism is made most famous by Saint Augustine of Hippo. In Book XI of his autobiographical *Confessions*, Augustine argues that only the current moment is "real" and "eternal," literally cut off from both the past and future (Augustine, 2002, 11.17.22). For the first two years of my transition I was subject to presentism's temporal logic in everyday interactions; I was read as existing only within the time of the event of that particular encounter. As such it was through the invisibility of my slantwise viewpoint, my continuously misread mixed genealogy, and oft unassumed trans history inscribed in and on my mixed trans body during the first two years of transition that I was forcibly realigned to a continuous mixed/queer

orientation of personal unknowing, undoing, and unlearning. My experience of de-creation shall become clearer through recalled interactions within marked queer spaces, everyday encounters with other people (both white and of color), and in a markedly changed relationship with a dog.

For a mixed race trans man working within the field of Women and Gender Studies like myself, who from birth locates himself in a queer line of class and racial descent through blood heritage, my racial, sexual and gender subjectivity has been and often still is constantly questioned and repositioned. I understand my mixed race and heritage background as non-normative partially through the history of the U.S. nation state's anxieties and exclusion of Chinese immigrants based off of characterizations of sexual deviance and long standing discourses of anti-miscegenation. Legal scholar Leti Volpp among other critical race theorists, discusses how anti-Chinese miscegenation laws in the United States regulating interracial intimacy between white and Chinese people characterized Chinese people as sexually deviant and morally lax beginning with the Page Law's explicit exclusion of Asian Women (characterizing them as prostitutes) in 1875 (2006, p.410–11). The connection between nonnormative sexuality and Chineseness is drawn out further by queer and mixed heritage scholar Wei Ming Daritois, who explicitly connects historical scientific and political discourses of interracial intimacy and mixed heritage children to racial queerness. Daritois writes, "In the sense of being outside of normative sexuality, the sexuality of Chinese was deemed 'queer' – specifically because of their race. Thus being able to determine or define someone's 'race' is the foundation of the power of the state to prevent racially 'queer' or 'transgressive' sexuality" (Daritois, 2007). As explained by Daritois, the determinative power of naming another subject's race, sexuality, and gender becomes a gatekeeping mechanism reinscribing the boundaries of normative sexuality and its accompanying racialized and gendered dimensions. Because of this looking outside the determinative strategies and institutions of the state has always been a cornerstone of queer and trans of color critique. Finding itself at the radical intersections of Ethnic, Gender and Sexuality Studies, queer and trans of color critique is also where I find this essay.

My place within both my chosen field in academia and other institutions was never more in question than during my first two years of hormonal transition. As was common for an earlier generation of transmasculine scholars in Women's and

Gender Studies, I was often asked what a “nice young man was doing in Women’s Studies.” I grew increasingly frustrated when, upon learning that I was assigned female at birth, my interlocutors would smile as if my nonconsensual sex and gender assignment explained this mystery (Because of course I was a feminist, I had been a girl!). Not only did this mentality traffic in some pretty hard transmisogyny, sex and gender essentialism, it flattened the broad range of types of feminisms and gender analyses from which the field is and has been approached. As my medical, and legal transition proceeded and these interactions became more and more common. I found myself increasingly reflecting on the ways my racialized gender history was being disappeared along with all of the sexual cultural touchstones I used to orient myself within LGBTQ spaces. My transmasculinity was disorienting me to the fields in which I came to know myself (academic, legal, medical, LGBTQ communal, everyday public space), and in turn I was disorienting to the people making up those fields. Unlearning the ways and means through which I positioned myself within and through communities that were at the same time constituting my sociality, actually meant aiding and challenging assumptions about the history of my embodiment. I had already been doing this for years with my race, and to some extent my gender. However, during this period any social interaction became an oft unwanted detangling and reconstitution of the history of my gendered, racialized, and sexualized body unpacking white cisnormative, and heteronormative assumptions, stemming from acute moments of realizing that someone is addressing you as someone who is not quite you. Being disoriented means you are affectively ejected out of social space, or more accurately feel beside yourself, feel the weight of scrutiny, and suddenly have a lot of explaining to do.

If transgender may be thought of as an interdependent term birthed through relationality as J. Jack Halberstam suggests in “Unlosing Brandon” from *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* then, “it describes not simply an identity but a relation between people, within a community, or within intimate bonds” (2005, p. 49). I would add to Halberstam’s understanding of transgender as a relation between people that the trans body materializes through intimate and communal bonds, and through the sedimentation of being gendered, racialized, and sexualized differently in non-intimate everyday contacts. The contingency of historical hailings in the everyday are especially shaping for trans people of color. My trans male body is made up and dependent on a history of sedimented hailing;

being socially and medically cited first as “she” and currently “he” gendering me about in the world.

During the first summer of my hormone therapy some of these layers of pronouns were a welcome relief; others cited my gender transitivity and history as female and resulted in my disorientation. Remaining within the structuring force of dualistic gendered language, my morphing body literally cited the incorporated history of my two adolescences. This ambiguity resulted in the confusion of passersby and made my maleness difficult to ascertain. In everyday interactions in classrooms, on the street, and in health centers and pharmacies, amongst cis lesbian, gay, and bi people as well as monoracial white and people of color, my Cantonese and white American identity was highlighted and reinterpreted as well as my orientation towards women through the social acknowledgement of my male gender identity. I found that the day(s) I became recognized as male, I became overtly racialized as not-White. But “what I was” racially was always up for speculation.

Ten autumns ago with my hormonal transition in full swing, I began to be read as an effeminate gay Asian cis man. If I passed as male at all. While I was occasionally mistakenly identified as a Polynesian woman (and called out on it), or a Latinx butch before transition, I found that during transition people, particularly men, were unafraid to call attention to my not-completely-white racial background on an almost daily basis. While Harvard Divinity School’s largely white student body and administration embraced my trans identity, I found it frustrating that the LG-BTIQ events at Harvard’s schools were primarily led by and aimed at wealthy, white gay cis men. In my interactions during meetings with queer leaders from Harvard’s other graduate schools I found myself repeatedly fetishized by white gay men who would point out the “exotic Asian” features of my body.

He was just curious. At least that’s what they all say. “What nice almond shaped eyes, you must be Japanese.” I assured the white gay cis male head of JFK’s (Harvard’s School of Government) queer student organization that I wasn’t. “No, and you know, I find that offensive.” He didn’t get the hint and proceeded along well worn territory. “You’ve got to be Japanese, I have a friend with exotic features who looks just like you.” Anger flared up inside me, quickly replaced by fear. His eyes drifted downwards. Here it comes. “Are you legal?”

I walked into what used to be Greg's Pizzeria in Berkeley my junior year at Cal and the two men working behind the counter asked me in Spanish how fluent I was. When I told them I only spoke a little, they seemed confused. Then it came, "Aren't you Mexican?" one of the men asked. "Chino" I said. They shook their heads. You never can tell. And even saying I am Chinese is only half of my racial background.

"Are you from China?" "Is your father from China?" "Are you from Brazil?" Random pedestrians will mistakenly inquire about my ethnicity through questioning my nationality on an almost daily basis around Cambridge or while riding the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA). The frequency I am asked these questions increases as I become regularly cited as male. Standing at 5'5" I am now well below average height for my gender, but am the exact same height as my Cantonese grandfather and perfectly fit the short Asian stereotype that my 5'7" father deals with on a daily basis. While occasionally asked if I was Hawaiian as a woman, people do not hold back their curiosity about my racial make up as a not-white male. I often wonder about this. What shielded people off before? Was it my tough butch dyke vibe? Am I now experiencing the social power of the stereotype of the effeminate Asian male? I know geographical location matters, UC Berkeley and the East Bay Area of Northern California is predominately Asian American with a sizable Latinx, African American and mixed population. In stark contrast I am an oddity, a lightly brown body in heavily white Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In an almost answer to those earlier ponderings...During the winter of my second year in UCLA's doctoral program I am waiting for a nighttime bus in Koreatown, when a black (and perhaps mixed) man who didn't appear much older than me approaches me. "Hey brother, what was your Dad?" I'm always more inclined to answer a person of color. "He is Cantonese, Chinese." "Do you speak Spanish?" I'm confused. "No." He chuckles and shakes his head, "So you're a white boy Latino. Too bad for your mom."

Mixed/queer genealogies such as mine involve both a becoming and decreating at once. Anne Carson describes the project of decreation as articulated initially by Simone Weil as a feeling of "joyless joy" and "an occasion...of exclusion and negation" (Carson, 2005, p. 170). An ecstatic bodily experience of undoing which

jettisons one outside the sense of a coherent and unified self, decreation calls up the material history of the past through the negative. Rather than destroying the self though, decreation signals a simultaneous opening toward a mysterious future. Like disorientation, decreation undoes the coherent sense of self through the feeling of being beside or outside of oneself. Importantly while both are grounded in the negative, decreation is a project, an act unmaking a subject by that subject, which opens one up to the happenstance of disorientation. In both negation is experienced through a generative loss, a becoming in the midst of exclusion and ejection.

In the racially mixed body, history runs forward and backward simultaneously. “A queer genealogy,” Sara Ahmed writes, “would take the very ‘affects’ of mixing, or coming into contact with things that reside on different lines, as opening up new kinds of connection” (2006, p. 154–5). Far from comfortable, these new kinds of connection with(in) mixed bodies create an “unsettling effect” internally and externally at their arrival with unmarked white bodies, and mark the impossibility of a return via the experience of negation. Ahmed (2006, p. 155) describes this as a dis- and re-orientation:

...the experience of negation, of being stopped or feeling out of place, of feeling uncomfortable at home, does not “stop” there. It is around such experiences that bodies gather, getting together, acting, refusing this inheritance of whiteness, refusing even the desire to follow that line. [...] In other words, the collective anger about the orientation of the world around whiteness might reorientate our relation to whiteness.

The orientation around white cis male privilege within that Harvard queer meeting was epitomized by my interaction with the JFK representative. He as a white cis man could not only accurately interpret my body as Japanese and cis male, but by asking me if I was legal enacted a long standing colonial discourse of the young Asian bottom boy desiring domination and penetration by an older white gay man. Richard Fung (1991) discusses the ways in which orientalist optics function within White-Asian gay male racialized politics of eroticism in gay video porn in his classic article *Looking for my Penis*. In particular the long standing older white man, young “house boy” role, in which “the Asian man acts the role of the mythologized geisha

or ‘the good wife’ [...] is one of the most persistent white fantasies about Asian men” (1991, p. 156) He elaborates that these oft commented upon, “self-conscious ‘Oriental’ signifiers are part and parcel of a colonial fantasy – and reality – that empowers one kind of gay man over another” (1991, p. 157).

Wilfully ignoring my insistence that I was not a Japanese gay cis man, my angry affective reaction to the JFK representative’s unsettling comments reoriented me to the glaring absence of my embodied presence (as a mixed race early twenty-something trans man) within what might have been a “queer home” space. Remembering my inaccurate pre-transition racialized and gendered interaction at Greg’s and the barrage of daily questions (and assumed answers) about my racial background only called into sharper relief the spectacle of my mixed race body. The sedimented memories of simultaneous mis-gendering, inaccurate racialization, and assumptions about my sexuality, recalled my bone deep anger about the “orientation of the world” around whiteness and cispatriarchy and its attendant inheritances and “desires to follow the line” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 155). I had to reorient how to articulate my positionality within spaces marked for certain bodies, become accustomed to the environmental effects undoing of the creature within myself, unknowing how my body would be signified by others.²

I realize that the quandary of rearticulating, and reorienting myself through writing about decreation and becoming lends itself to some internal contradictions. Carson describes the different moves Simone Weil, Marguerite Ponte, and Sappho take in “undergoing an experience of decreation” and participating in the paradoxical “writerly project” of describing it (Carson, 2005, p. 171; 179). She explains:

[T]o be a writer is to construct a big, loud, shiny centre of self from which the writing is given voice and any claim to be intent on annihilating this self while still continuing to write and give voice to writing must involve the writer in some important acts of subterfuge or contradiction. (2005, p. 171)

Carson argues that rather than think of the contradiction of the act as undermining the writer’s project of articulating decreation, one must allow for its necessary uses. She states, “to undo self one must move through self, to the very inside of its definition. We have nowhere else to start” (2005, p. 179). Unmaking and rearticu-

lating held past identities through the disorienting process of decreation will lead to some contradiction, but that is why it is the place to start. It is how the process of transitioning works. The affects of past identities are never quite disposed of, they follow us and resurface, are part of the creature within us, and learning how to feel and articulate them is part of transition as well. Perhaps the most contradictory affects in my transition in the nexus of my racial, gendered, and sexual self came through my fraught relationship with my previously held hapa tomboy identities.

Hapa, a Hawaiian term meaning half, was the way I described my Cantonese and Caucasian racial heritage growing up. When I was a skinny little tomboy playing kickball in my tender bare feet on the scorching blacktop of Mililani, Hawaii my Cantonese/Japanese cousins used to tease my siblings and I calling us “Hapa Haole³.” Interestingly, they chose the appropriated Native term to mark us by our difference, our foreign whiteness instead of Pake, the Hawaiian term meaning Chinese. I wondered why it is a linguistic impossibility to be Hapa Pake Haole, it seemed paradoxical to pick one or the other. But that means of course one has to choose which racial signifier to precede the other after hapa. Often, when I would tell someone that I identified as hapa, and they found out what that means, I presented an additional disclaimer that I did not have Hawaiian heritage. Because I claimed a racial identity appropriating Hawaiian terminology, I problematically was seen as more legitimately Hawaiian than Cantonese. (This period of self-explaining and identifying lasted until college when hapa clubs and their resulting mixed Asian and white members were plentiful.)

When I choose mixedness as my racial identity, I do so with the history of understanding haole whiteness as other, because that was how I came to understand my difference from other Asian Americans. Like Ahmed, I understood that the question of “what are you?” when asked outside of my intimate communities is oriented around whiteness to straighten out the wrinkles in assumed monoracial normativity that mixed folks embody. Ahmed describes the ways white bodies fall into spaces because they align with the straight institutional and historical orientations of spaces. She extends this to the positivism of the agential “I can” in the field of phenomenology itself saying, “such a phenomenology, in other words, describes the ease with which the white body extends itself in the world through how it is orientated toward objects and others” (2006, p. 138). Ahmed says that, “If the mixed-race body wishes to be white (in the sense of being orientated ‘around’

whiteness), it is also orientated toward whiteness as the object of desire. [...] For not being white can also reorientate your relation to whiteness even if the ‘not’ might at first generate a negative impression” (2006, p. 146). Mixed genealogy allows for a slantwise view that makes certain bodies, desires, histories and identificatory losses, come into view; to me racial difference was initially understood as whiteness rather than Asian-ness. But of course within a larger society institutionally orientated around whiteness, mixedness becomes a point of continual contestation or reorientation to whiteness. The lines cross, merge and yet linguistically I must parse them out.

In the social, and embodied “crisis” of (in)visible mixedness, a body merging two problematically assumed disparate wholes, the gap between the times governing understanding and claiming racial, gender, and sexual identities, and the interpretation of the mixed and trans body through everyday continuous hailing becomes a crucial point of reorientation to a mixed orientation recalling a mixed genealogy. I could only understand my racialized gender and sexual orientation linearly in my body, that was and is how it is lived moment-by-moment. However, the temporal methods of understanding my identities and their relationship to my body, seemed to enter a different temporal schema when called into being by others. It was as though twenty different histories regulated through cisnormative understandings of sexuality and race were being read onto me and through me with each social interaction. “What are you?” seemed to become more of a question of “When are you?” by friends, family members and passerby alike. As in, “Where are you along in my imagined time of your transition?” “When are you going to get bottom surgery?” My body’s temporality was already off course with whiteness, and now had moved into another timestream that cis people were trying to understand through their own orientating points of gender, sexual, class, and racialized history.

Ahmed describes multiple temporalities and relationships to time, through her descriptions of feeling out mixed orientations operating through mixed bodies. The seeming secrecy of a mixed genealogy “does not only take us back but points us toward the future” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 152). Hidden in the background of the mixed race body, reorientation to a mixed orientation relieves the mixed body of necessarily revealing the “what” of the often asked question “What are you?” by bridging the gap between lines. As Ahmed (2006, p. 153) details:

A mixed orientation might even preserve the secrecy of the other side, as the “side” that is behind what we face, even at the very moment we turn around to face what is behind us. At the same time, being mixed offers more than one side from which to have an “angle” on the world. Inheritance does not always hold things in place but instead keeps open the space for new arrivals, for new objects, which have their own horizons. If inheritance means to receive and to possess, then it might also open up a gap between reception and possession.

The gap in which I received and possessed “Hapa” as a tomboy is the same space which offered me an opening to distil my experience of hormonal transition. This is not the same as saying processes of racialization were behind or before my masculinity, but rather the two have always already informed each other. Inheriting a mixed orientation allowed me a queer angle on my embodied arrival into physical maleness, and a place no male blood kin had gone before. It was this slantwise view that I inherited, and continued feeling out as my transition unfolded.

And yet the history of mixed race Asian Americans appropriating and possessing Indigenous Hawaiian racial identifications for a kind of queer pan-Asian mixed solidarity, is one replicating old Asian settler colonial narratives and practices in Hawaii. (This is also the side that is behind what I face, even as I turn back to write about what is behind me.) I learned this once I arrived at UCLA four years into my social and three years into my hormonal transition. Because of my reflections on the ways racialized gender shaped my transmasculinity, I could not ignore the ways in which I was what Reese Simpkins (2016) terms becoming-intersectional, not only through the materialization of gendered racial sexualization, but through a changing sedimentation of citational history. My claiming and disclaiming of the political, cultural, and social inheritance of hapa, like the inheritance of transmasculinity comes with the force of histories of dispossession, hegemonic whiteness, and cultural imperialism, even while both identificatory positionalities have been hailed as exceptionally postmodern and neoliberal.⁴ This is what is meant by transition as decreation, a project doing/undoing what has constituted the self – including the losses and legacies of violence behind that self – by and through self, to the very heart of definition. What was in fact constituting a “you” has always meant the erasure and unmaking of someone else. This has continuously played out in the various modal structures of White and Asian settler colonialism and im-

perialism in Hawaii (economic, linguistic, educational, political), and the cultural, economic, and social capital of transmasculinity.

As Ahmed says, inheritance does not always hold things into place, it often widens the gap between reception and possession. Reese Simpkins argues that becoming-intersectional is, “an intersectional trans*feminist politics based on... process over positionality” a kind of dynamic phenomenological movement (what Simpkins terms “onto-epistem-ological production”) grounded in the material body (Simpkins, 2016, p. 229). Shaking out the reorientation to identifications, objects, and others, what inheritances may open up is a dynamic relationship to the historical and material past on and through the body. But this dynamism, the move to affective process over positionality, is still felt against a linear understanding of bodily progress, and there are always losses...

I knew the moment it happened, that people might say the day I “truly become male” was the day Barney didn’t recognize me. The three year old Cocker Spaniel I had helped housebreak during the fall of my senior year at UC Berkeley fled in terror as I knelt down and called out his name in my newly baritone voice. This was a complicated moment for me. Barney was terrified of cis men, so it was nice to see that four months of hormone therapy had erased some of my embodied “femaleness,” all the way down to my scent. But on the other hand I felt that I no longer bore a trace of J’s former queer female roommate, and in a way I felt that my interrelational history with Barney (the housebreaking, training, and bonding) had been erased. I was visiting J at her new house near the Oakland border in August after my first year at Harvard Divinity School, and while I still had not had top surgery and was socially recognized as male eighty percent of the time, I felt the only somatic difference testosterone had made was my voice drop an octave (and frustratingly break during every other word).

Although I knew that I had not exchanged bodies or lives with someone else, there were moments over the first two years of my medical transition which felt that way. In fact, there are still moments where the paradox of loss through the becoming of transition with its reoriented relationships feel unbearable. This is how you know you are being decrelated. You feel that “joyless joy” of mis/recognition by a being who did and did not know “you.” It is not popular to talk about losing dur-

ing transition; we think about what we gain in terms of community, and what must be sacrificed is seen as what is necessary to constitute ourselves. There are enough transphobic narratives regulating our stories that try to incorporate loss into regretting transitioning (especially when hormones and/or surgery is involved). But I think what this actually does is force us to restructure our narratives into something understandable, positive, progressive, linear, and unqualifiably cisnormative. I find this limiting in emotional scope, antifeminist, racist, and transphobic. It is easy to focus on how trans people's gender is verbally constituted by others, and particularly the ways in which our gender is conferred onto our intelligible or unreadable bodies through "passing." But using "passing" uncritically (especially with the term's history in communities of color) bifurcates these temporally and affectively complex moments. This is how our bodies become unreachable within conventional genealogy (I am supposed to celebrate Barney not knowing me because then I "really am a man"), and when it is ourselves that come into view, we begin to start seeing slantwise in order to understand why I can feel out-of-time in that mis/recognition.

To see slantwise it is helpful to turn to what Judith Butler refers to as the subject's incorporated history. In "Performativity's Social Magic" Butler (1999, p. 119) critiques and comments on Bourdieu's notion of habitus and its relationship to the "objective field:"

... the *habitus* presupposes the field from the start, and is itself composed of sedimented rituals framed and impelled by the structuring force of that field. Indeed, it seems that subject, insofar as it is necessarily embodied, and the body is itself the site of "incorporated history", is not set over and against an "objective" domain, but has that very "objectivity" incorporated as the formative condition of its very being.

The formative conditions of my being rendered and cited as a male subject necessitated my view already being structured by an objective field of masculinity dressing, walking and now hormonally incorporating male social cues into my body. As part of the objective domain making up my incorporated history, my relationship to Barney helped constitute the formative conditions of my transmasculinity. To be misrecognized during the moment of reintroduction, felt as though my self was

being split, or that I had taken on the life of someone else. If anything this encounter with a non-speaking subject spoke louder to me about loss of a complex gender history than being hailed by a random passerby in the street. The objective fear of a dog meant that something physical and social, but unspoken had been remade within me, and I was being framed and impelled by the structuring danger of a cis man.

As I anxiously moved in the world I was also resituating the field around me as a hormonally transitioning subject now being cited as female, now as male. Seeing slantwise allowed for loss to be felt as the decreation of a transspecies relationship inside of the resituated field. As my encounter with Barney demonstrated, the formative condition of my being a male subject also assumed an incorporated history that was not mine, denying my formative experiences as a female bodied and cited subject. Even while the sediment was settling around me and I was being confirmed in the gender I identified with I was losing the citational history of my gendered and cissexual past. Within the objective domain of the social, my queer incorporated history was becoming purely relegated to the realm of affect, felt through the lingering remembrances of past relationships, made invisible to the passerby, with my queer body hidden and bound beneath my clothing. I was becoming the gap between the lines, disoriented and mixed, decreated at the moment of re-creation.

There is always the moment I pause, syringe in hand, and realize how different things would be if I didn't inject 100mls of testosterone cypionate into my thigh every fourteen days. I know the masculinization of my body is dependent upon synthesized hormones suspended in sunflower seed oil, deployed into my bloodstream via a 1 cc syringe and purchased for a discounted ten dollars at CVS with my Harvard Student Health insurance. Without my student insurance a 50ml vial of testosterone cypionate would be upwards of eighty dollars or more. As a Harvard Student, not only do I have pharmacy discounts but access to a mental and primary health care team that specializes in gender identity and has written me letters for hormone and surgical therapy.

All these economic, educational, and medical privileges lead me to the moment I plunge that 25 gauge .65 inch needle into my sanitized thigh. Bleeding, I remove the needle quickly pulling up the epidermal layer which clings to the thin shaft of

metal. I wait for the now rapid changes testosterone brings to my body; increased hair on my back, legs, arms, face and stomach, thinning of the hair around my temples, the continued deepening of my voice, an increased libido as well as an ability to take on muscle, and the continued cessation of menses. As the visible markers of my female past recede into the background and my body becomes more accustomed to this bi-monthly ritual I cannot help feeling like the werewolf rapidly transforming with each new moon.

It is a tumultuous entry into manhood that I experience; I feel pain and loss on many levels even while I gain the advantages of becoming anonymously male. With facial hair comes outbreaks of acne, with the enlargement of my clitoris into a small phallus comes the desire to ejaculate that will never occur, with the desiring glance from my cis lover and surprising allowance of being openly affectionate in public comes the acknowledgement of being read as a straight couple and loss of queer visibility that has been integral to my identity. I often find myself situated in a place where my queerness is contested on the basis of the homo/hetero divide. Do I need to be attracted to cis men and/or trans men to be gay? Is my queer sexual orientation dependent on my gender identity or is it more about my equipment matching my partner's genitals? There is something spectacular, something monstrous about my transformation especially in the ways my race, gender, sex, and sexuality is (mis)recognized by other beings.

I now have access to male spaces and social expectations due to the economic and pharmacological resources enabled by my educational status as a Harvard and later UCLA graduate student. The nature of my transition from female to male operated within the double bind of being bound to a surgical and hormonal means of recognized embodiment; what was “mutilation” is also enablement, what was read as safety is also dangerous to my historical past. It undoes me even as I am continuously made. I found myself unable to articulate my story without being negative or positive, to escape the dualistic ways of narrating, relating to cis people who want to understand what phenomenology is for a mixed trans man.

It is this gap between negation and positivity, the rupturing “wrinkles” in straight cis time that I find the connection between Ahmed’s mixed orientation, Carson’s definition of decreation and my own understanding of falling into a queer

time and hidden space. What is behind me can come forward in a queer politics of hope, not by reaching a utopic future in which I will be fully recognized and understood, but one rooted in the present as a threshold which understands:

[T]he lines that accumulate through the repetition of gestures, the lines that gather on skin, already take surprising forms. We have hope because what is behind us is also what allows other ways of gathering in time and space, of making lines that do not reproduce what we follow but instead create wrinkles in the earth. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 178–9)

My definition of self, created through my acquired habits, turnings within the environment must continuously be moved through, decreated piece-by-piece for a new transfeminist slantwise view opening up new queer genealogies. In doing so I do not give up the material conditions of my racialized, sexualized, and gendered history, it is always behind and before me as the sides gifted by various relationships to my parents, lovers, friends, passersby, and a certain cocker spaniel. In the spectacle of my queer/trans mixedness, I create wrinkles on the earth making a space for others to do likewise, even as I follow those before me.

Endnotes

- ¹ I think it is misleading to call transition linear in any fashion, and so while I use the term female-to-male here in alignment with accepted transgender terminology I hope my narrative will demonstrate a queer disruption of straight narrated temporality. I certainly have felt/still feel out of time and place within any community organized around an identity category, especially white transmasculine ones. To speak of transition is always also to speak of the sociality of haunting in the terms of what Avery Gordon describes in *Ghostly Matters*; what is placed in the material background continuously comes forward as a structure of feeling, often in disruptive and surprising ways. (See Gordon, 1997, p. 201)
- ² Which of course was only highlighted in my later interaction with the black man at the bus stop. A people of color brotherhood in which I was being situated as Latino/Chinese without my understanding was taking place through my lack of knowledge of Spanish. Of course my interlocutor could have been mixed himself, which is what I find particularly interesting about the conversation.

- ³ Haole means foreigner in Hawaiian, but was originally used to designate white non-natives.
- ⁴ For the argument of transsexuality as postmodern embodiment heralding of the end of modernist interpretations of the body, see Stryker (1999). See Spade (2011) for the ways neoliberalism as political and economic system has shaped current definitions of trans.

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